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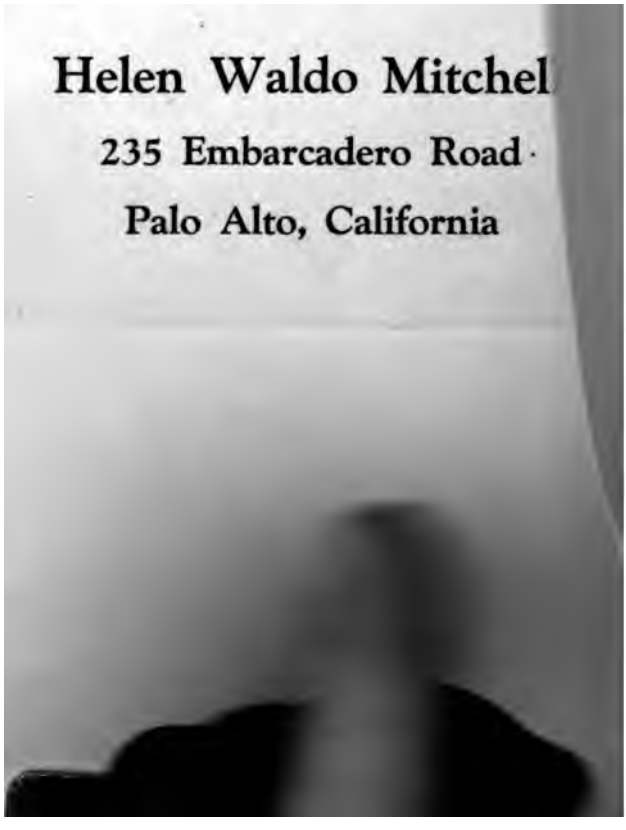
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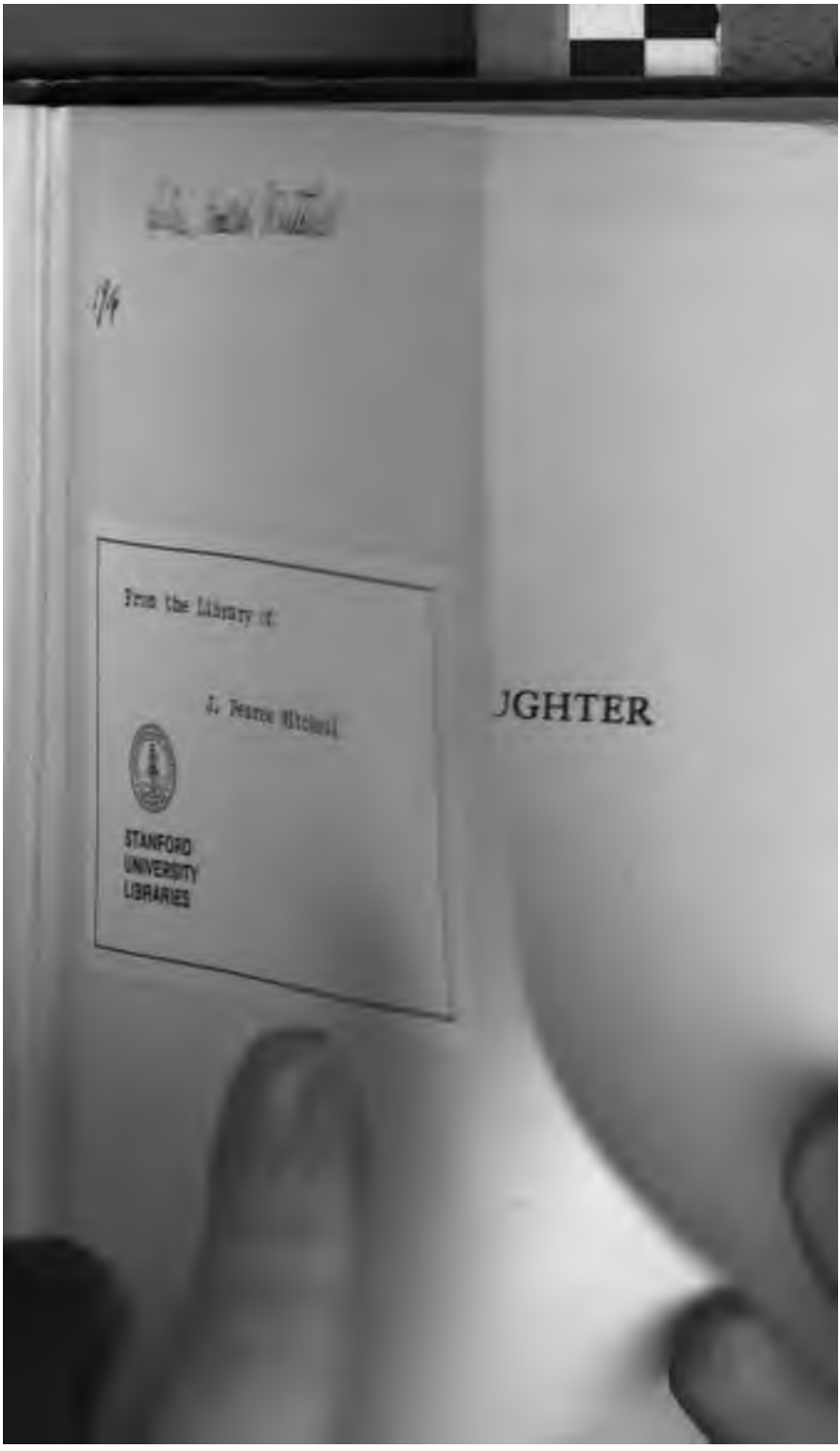
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TO-DAY'S DAUGHTER

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"This slim, dark fiancé of hers was almost the only person who could embarrass her." [PAGE 141]

TO-DAY'S DAUGHTER

BY

JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON

AUTHOR OF "THE INHERITANCE," "THE STRANGE CASES OF DR. STANCHON," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

C. D. WILLIAMS

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TO

G. R. S.

WITH WARM REGARD

FROM

J. D. B.

August, 1914

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TO-DAY'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

The Battle Opens

"I THINK you take the curaçoa, Fettauer?" said the doctor, moving comfortably in his after-dinner calm. "The curaçoa for Doctor Fettauer, Potts, and I'll have some green mint. Now, what's all this about, anyhow? What's the matter with all the girls? What do they want? I thought it was the suffrage that was bothering Lutie, but it seems not. *I* can't give it to her, you know!"

The square-chinned young Austrian, with the surgeon's hands, smiled, opened his mouth, shut it again and sighed. More subtle racially than the elder man of another generation, the difficulty of his task frightened him before he had begun it; and he cast about for words that should be plain, but not too brutal.

"You know, doctor," he began at last, "I've always diagnosed this suffrage situation a little more leniently than you. The suffrage cause isn't a cause at all, to begin with—it's an effect."

"Very clever, my boy," rumbled Doctor Stanchon, "very clever indeed."

"All right," Fettauer went on, "but it's true, too, you know—some clever things are. To go on: it's not an end—only a means."

"But to what—a means to what, in heaven's name?"

"Ah," said the younger man, more somber now of eye and flexible European intonation—*"voilà!* That's what they don't know."

"But that's like laying out a railway without any terminal!" cried the exasperated elder. "What a waste of good rails!"

The Austrian savored his last brown drops with an inward satisfaction that Doctor Stanchon's gulped portion could never have brought, and pried interestedly among the contents of the great mahogany humidor.

"Ah, there they are! What do you call these little twisted ones?" he demanded. "My man simply doesn't believe in them."

"You're looking for matches," the doctor returned gloomily, "and you won't find 'em. Where's that alcohol flame, Potts?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I spoke to Miss Stanchon about it and she said she'd attend to it. Matches, sir?"

"Oh, well!" He lighted his great cigar grumblingly. "That's what it is to change your servants after eighteen years! Lutie thinks she can manage this place with one hand tied behind her back—told me that a while ago; and now I trust she's beginning to see that it was Mary and Old Mary all the time!"

"Mary was wonderful, certainly."

Stanchon puffed angrily.

"That woman was worth Potts and the new office nurse put together. Fettauer! She was a butler and a secretary and an—an interne, all in one! And what do you think that girl of mine said when they left us? That in any other walk of life—an office, for instance—Mary'd have gone on being promoted and raised, over and over again, and ended at the head of the force; while here thirty-five dollars a month was her limit!"

The other smiled irresistibly.

"Well, isn't it so?" he asked mildly.

"So? So?" scowled the doctor. "Didn't I offer her forty? Forty-five? What good did it do? Oh, no—she had to be Miss McGuire! At fifteen dollars a week and board herself! And Old Mary backing her up, mind you! 'Sure, Doctor Stanchon, sir; it'll be worth the difference to us both when I hear 'em askin' for Miss McGuire!' "

He mimicked well and Fettauer's smile burst into a hearty laugh.

"And Lucia stood by her? There's the modern girl for you, doctor! They're logical anyhow."

"Humph!" The doctor puffed out an angry cloud. "About as logical as that railroad of yours without any terminal!"

"I didn't say there was no terminal," his guest shot back. "I said they hadn't built it yet—quite another thing."

"But if they haven't any plans——"

"Ah, plans—plans!" Fettauer spread his supple, blunt-tipped fingers eloquently. "What are their plans worth? It's not that. What does it matter what they think? It's what they do! They're the doing animals, Stanchon; and afterward they think—or not, as the case may be," he added meditatively. "In fact I doubt if they think much until they've done, really. Take Eve's case—apple first, philosophy afterward."

The elder man smiled in spite of himself.

"That's a pity if it's true."

"Ah, how do you know, doctor? How do you know?" the other demanded. "Who are we, to say? Where would your job have been in Eden?"

The doctor's forehead unwrinkled.

"No measles for Cain and Abel—eh?" he agreed, "well, perhaps!"

"Not at all—no Cain and Abel, if I remember Genesis!" Fettauer suggested quickly.

And again the doctor muttered:

"Perhaps—perhaps!"

They sat in the smoke and silence of a strong friendship; only the fire whickered on the hearth.

"Well, Max," said the deep voice quietly at last, "what is it? I understand my daughter actually wants to go into business."

"I suppose it amounts to that—yes."

"Can you explain to me why?"

"I could, doctor, but suppose you tell me why not!"

"Because," said Doctor Stanchon shortly, "I cannot see that she has either the time or the talent for it—or the necessity."

"Ah! Let us take them separately if you don't mind, doctor. To begin with, why hasn't she the time?"

"Why?" the elder man's bushy eyebrows met. "For Heaven's sake, Fettauer, who has ever stinted her in time? Has she ever had a serious task imposed on her since she left school? But eight hours a day, rain or shine—it's ridiculous!"

"And yet," the younger man replied musingly, "without eight hours a day, rain or shine, was anything ever accomplished, really?"

"She got on well enough until this year," said Lucia's father shortly.

"Yes, until the old servants left and she saw what the detail of a successful physician's house implied. That interfered with her work, you see."

"Her work! My dear Fettauer, it isn't possible that those women have hypnotized you?"

"I don't believe so, doctor. Only, if that isn't her work, what is?"

"Will you tell me, my dear boy, who laid the reform of the New York Prison system on those women's shoulders? Will you tell me who, when this fad has exhausted itself and gone to join the countless others that have preceded it, will ever dream of complaining of them because they dropped it? Or who will have the right?"

"What do you consider her work?" Fettauer repeated patiently.

"To fulfill her ordinary obligations here in her own house, and after that do what she chooses. God knows I never put a straw in her way!"

"Exactly. You never put a straw. And now you plump down a—a haystack in front of her. She's tried scrambling over it and found it undignified; now she's going to walk round it, simply."

"Simply! That's just it—simply!"

Fettauer smiled a wry smile—the bitterness of the elder generation was so pathetic.

"Now listen, doctor," he said gently. "Just think a moment. A few minutes ago you asked me, 'Has she ever had a serious task imposed on her since she left school?' And now suddenly you impose one—on a grown woman!"

The elder man shot a keen glance across the smoke.

"*Touché!*" he said honestly. "You had me there, Fettauer—a palpable hit! But surely the responsibility is obvious? Who else is to do it? And, after all, it isn't so much, you know. Suppose she had married—you, for instance."

His eyes gleamed at the young man, who met them impenetrably.

"Yes—me, for instance," he repeated placidly. "Well?"

"As if one could break a surgeon's nerve!" Stanchon thought, and smiled to himself. "Well, wouldn't she have to do it for you? And bring up children besides? And look after your social duties generally?"

"Perhaps that's why she's not married," said Fettauer quietly.

"Oh, nonsense! Damned nonsense!" This was a frank explosion, and they waited until the echoes had died away.

"What I mean," Fettauer went on imperturbably, "is this: If you had said to your daughter after she left school, 'Now, my dear, playtime is over. Irresponsibility, tutors, governesses and chaperons are done with. Now you must learn to be the head of my house, because as such you practically regulate my income, and that is a profession in itself'—if you had said that—"

"It wasn't necessary. My sister did it all."

"Very well. Then why should it interest Lucia?"

"But, heavens and earth, what did interest her? It isn't as if she had been a genius—I'd have been delighted——"

"Ah!" The younger man flung out a flexible forefinger accusingly. "There we have it! My dear doctor, it's just here the generations lock horns! You can't see this, I know, but, believe me, you must! You must! Listen—'the time or the talent or the necessity,' I think you said? Well, we're at the talent now. It wasn't so many generations ago, doctor, that the very genius you admit as an excuse wasn't accepted as one. Think of the poor little Brontës! And the great—the forever unexplainable Jane! Why, your grandfather wouldn't have considered *Pride and Prejudice* in exchange for polite conversation in the home circle, for a moment!

"Now you've got beyond that," he went on. "If she had been a writer, a painter, or even an actress, you'd back her up. That's been open water for women for a long time. But, short of that, you're like your grandfather—you're polar ice, Stanchon—polar ice! Just because poor Lucia isn't a genius."

"Poor Lucia!"

"All right, doctor; but I pity her!"

"Humph!" Doctor Stanchon snorted enigmatically and strangled in his smoke.

"Why, see here!" cried the young surgeon defiantly. "Why am I here to-day? Do you know? Because I felt a great compelling call to anatomical research? Not at all. Some one in my family has always been a doctor—that's all! Over there in Neustadt there's been a Doctor Fettauer since there was a town pump. And the other sons are in chemical mills or lecturing on German philosophy in the *Universität.* We don't change over there, you know. Well! It happened I was the only boy. So nothing was too good for me.

"Liza married my cousin; and there was the chemical part attended to directly, for he owns the biggest mills in the country. Nette persisted in being a little *bas bleu;* and when father couldn't starve her out of it, he gave way, and she lectures on Schopenhauer all over England, Scotland, and Wales now, to judge from the newspaper notices she sends me. The old gentleman's fearfully proud of her now, though she really should have gone to Oxford instead of me; because, you see, though I was naturally picked out for a doctor I wasn't very keen, and I wanted to *flâner* about Oxford for a while—so, of course, I had to.

"But Sophie—poor little Sophie!" He bit into a new cigar nervously, then went on: "What did it

matter to anybody that Sophie mended all the cats and dogs and birds in the neighborhood? Who cared whether her laboratory in the cellar interested every mill expert that came to the house? Who did anything more than scold her when we found out that all her recreation periods were spent sneaking about the hospital? Sophie was the Fettauer doctor, Stanchon; I should have married money because of my *beaux yeux*, and she should be lecturing at Johns Hopkins!"

"Did she marry money?" Stanchon inquired interestedly; he had never heard his guest speak so long or so openly.

"Indeed, yes. Ah, well—she has six children now and no waist at all! And the little cakes she puts away in an afternoon—*du Liebe!*"

"And no laboratory?" the doctor inquired, amused.

Fettauer sobered.

"Oh, yes, a fine one—but it's still in the cellar!"

The top log burned through with a snap, and Stanchon rose heavily and mended the fire.

"When will that man learn that I want the kindling kept here!" he complained. "I wish Lutie wouldn't let them take the ashes away."

"Now what I'm getting at is this," the young man pursued: "That Lucia has no special talent has nothing to do with it. I hadn't, I firmly believe. And yet I got my nose down to the grindstone; I put my brains and vitality into my profession; and—I've done very well with it. And, what's more, I'm deeply interested in it. Lucia has brains and a great vitality—and no vocation, as they used to call it. Would that have mattered had she been a boy? Not at all. At thirty she'd have been at it eight hours a day, rain or shine, or you'd have been horribly ashamed of her—him, I mean. And now

she's horribly ashamed of herself if she isn't at it. That's all! You've got to give up that 'talent,' doctor; they won't have it."

Stanchon pushed the decanters away and leaned forward.

"And yet, in her particular case, what does she do that any paid secretary couldn't?"

"What would she do here that any paid housekeeper couldn't?" Fettauer shot back.

"Oh," the elder man twinkled, "that's unworthy of you, my young friend! Do we really want only housekeepers, we poor old reactionaries?"

"Evidently," insisted the other inexorably, "since Mary and Old Mary satisfied you up to now!" They stared at each other. "You see," Fettauer persisted, "it isn't the little touches, the head of the table, the flowers in the drawing-room, the woman's atmosphere that Lucia grudges. That's easy enough for her vitality. They're still perfectly willing to worry about their clothes, too. But she can't carry that alcohol-flame affair on her mind. And you mustn't nag her about it, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or I'm afraid she'll get out altogether!"

"Get out? Are you crazy? There's no necessity!"

"Not the 'time or the talent or the necessity!'" the young man quoted again with a smile. "My dear doctor, the necessity is there—is going to be there increasingly for her generation. It is the necessity for self-expression; and keeping the ashes in your grate doesn't fulfill it—that's all! You see perfectly clearly that a professional secretary could do Lucia's work on this precious committee of hers. Well, I'm not so entirely sure you're right, doctor. The woman that goes in for that sort of job hasn't Lucia's heredity, her social training,

her enthusiasm or her vitality. She's not used to taking her ditches so—so buoyantly, if you see what I mean. All the repressed constructive ability of generations is bubbling up in Lucia, and the ordinary wage-earning woman simply hasn't got it!"

"Exactly," Stanchon burst in, "and we gave 'em all that vitality by sheltering 'em and keeping the strain off."

"Granted—granted, doctor; you did. And why? Because you were preparing them for the strain of maternity; strengthening your daughters for their great natural trial. Now here they are, trained to a hair—and the event doesn't come off. What happens? Explosion!"

"For God's sake, then, why won't they marry?" Stanchon groaned and twisted in his big chair.

"Ah—why?" The younger man shrugged lightly and evaded the tired eyes that hunted his. "My dear man, we're watching history made in these days. Biological history if you like; but history for all that. It's a centrifugal generation, that's all! Personally speaking, I feel that the scheme is big enough to include it—you don't seem to. I should hate to think that when evolution meets Lucia, Lucia would win, so to speak!"

"Ah, it all comes back to Lucia, doesn't it?" said Lucia's father, smiling whimsically. "Fettauer, I had hoped—I admit I feared at first—but of late I had hoped——"

"I know! I know!" the other interrupted. "I know, doctor. And I, too. But—isn't that the lady now?"

CHAPTER II

Cross-Firing

"HELLO! Hello! Heavens, there's not much smoke in here, is there?"

Lucia threw off a business-like frogged ulster and emerged, a tightly swathed and spangled chrysalis. A smoke-blue fillet twisted through her light brown hair brought out its fugitive gold and deepened her gray eyes to a deceptive forget-me-not. Judged by the high standards of her country she was not pretty, but thirty years of carefully guarded vitality were flowering now into the delayed perfection of the northern woman; and Nature, finishing her latest product, struggled bravely with the frank, boyish look, the squared shoulders, the flat, modish hip-line—with the result of a distinct, if new, sort of magnetism. It was almost as if a fresh type—some new and charming species of gray-eyed lad—had come out of that frogged ulster; a lad hitherto buttoned into Lutie's Creed suits, with the quaint little artificial bouquet at the lapel!

"Well! How do you think I look?"

The lad ran away from her eyes and a charming woman slipped into his place and peeped at them from under the bronze lashes.

Her father smiled as fathers smile when their only daughters ask them this; but Max Fettauer raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun!" she agreed.

"You're getting fat," he said gravely, "and you need a little bit more color. No exercise!"

"You're a pig!" she answered promptly. "And it's a pale season. Beef cheeks are out."

"I know," and he looked appraisingly at her; "white face, red lips, black eyebrows, like the ladies at the Paris races! But it's not your type, all the same, and you only look as if you were taking too much tea."

"I *am* gaining," she admitted regretfully, "but I don't eat lunch half the time. Give me a cigarette, that's a dear—will you, father?"

"I wish, if you must smoke, you'd take a pipe, my dear," Doctor Stanchon complained, handing her a small red box. "It would be so much better for you! And how you can have a young man in the house who talks to you like that passes my comprehension! What are the girls coming to?"

"Their senses, dad, dear! Max is all right—he's a true friend. I weigh a hundred and forty." She shot him an audacious look and he bit his lip; she had never called him Max before.

"I wish it was fifty!" her father stormed, collapsing suddenly under their allied laughter. "All right," he grumbled, "but let me tell you both that when your nerve cells are covered——"

"I understand that," the young surgeon interrupted placidly, "but you and Miss Stanchon are speaking from different points of view, and I'm taking hers—that's all! For the silhouette she wishes to attain, fat is fatal."

"Then she shouldn't wish it!"

"Ah," Fettauer waved his cigar.

"That I don't pretend to control!"

CROSS-FIRING

"Is Potts up?" Lucia said abruptly. "I want something to eat. Some sandwiches, will you, Potts? And —Oh, some ginger ale. And I'd rather have beef; but not that nasty English mustard—French. And ask them upstairs for those papers in the big red envelope on my desk. Where is the alcohol-flame thing?"

"Excuse me, Miss Stanchon, but it's quite out of order; I understood you were to complain about it," Potts explained with the meek triumph peculiar to butlers in his circumstances.

"Oh, Lord!" Lucia sank into a chair and scowled frankly at the men. "It would be a lot easier to buy a new one! My life has been haunted by that darned thing—haunted! It's way downtown, and they don't deliver above Fifty-ninth Street—the idea! I shall never get the time, and there's no use pretending I shall! If Potts had any sense he'd attend to it; but he grows stupider every day of his life! I wish you'd bounce him, father."

"He's not a housekeeper, of course," said Doctor Stanchon briefly.

"Look at Celestine Varnham's man—Williams. Why, that man——"

"The man is a crook," her father interrupted, "and, I told you, Lutie, all about him. He is a dangerous fellow and has made a great deal of trouble. I have too many butler-run houses in my practice already without adding to the list. As for the alcohol-flame——"

"Let me attend to it, Miss Stanchon," said Fettauer quickly. "I have to go downtown to-morrow to see about some instruments. Whereabouts is it?"

"You're an angel!" cried Lucia, falling on the sandwiches. "Don't pour any more on my dress, Potts, than you can help, will you? . . . I'll have it put into the

car before you go—father, if that man has used English mustard I shall bounce him myself!"

"You might just as well get over your absurd prejudice against Potts, my dear, for I shan't change again. Three times in three months is my limit. And if you would put a little more attention on the details of the house you would find——"

"I don't think we need to go into that again to-night, father?"

Lucia's voice was dangerously edged; her crystal-tipped slippers swayed restlessly. "I'll send for that alcohol thing, Doctor Fettauer, and I'm ever so much obliged——"

"Lucia!" Her father straightened in his chair. "You can't mean that you are taking Max seriously?"

"Why not? Of course I am."

"Then I must tell you that I cannot allow it. It is ridiculous! He has no time——"

"It was my own idea, doctor, you know," Fettauer interrupted peaceably.

"He has as much time as I have," said Lutie.

"Oh, you are beyond reason, Lucia!" her father cried. "You ought to be spanked! As much time as you have! Why, the man's earning his living!"

"Oh, well, if that's the idea, let me earn mine, then!"

Lucia leaned back in her chair and crossed her knees lightly; her eyes flamed with excitement.

"Oh, Lord! now it's coming!" the young man thought, half alarmed, half amused.

"What could you earn in a year?" said her father bluntly.

"Fifteen hundred—to begin on," she shot back.

"How?"

"Office management and traveling about to speak on

this prison work—I'm going to Boston to-morrow anyway."

"She speaks very well, too, doctor," said Fettauer.

"And for how long do you imagine this would last?"

"Well, if it grows at the rate it has in the last two years, and spreads through the country as it seems to be doing, it will last a good while. If it doesn't I'll have a lot of experience—and things always open up."

"Good heavens!"

"As a matter of fact, doctor, things do!" Fettauer added.

"It seems a little hard to us cut-and-dried professionals, with all our years of grind, but there's a new field opening every day almost for a clever, attractive young woman."

Stanchon scowled at him.

"See here, Lucia," he began abruptly, "will it make you feel any better if I give you fifteen hundred a year to manage my establishment—and cut off your allowance? Because I'll do it."

Fettauer swallowed a smile, then sighed at the hopefulness of the elder man. He did not even glance at Lucia. She shook her head slowly.

"That's awfully decent of you, dad, but I couldn't. I don't like housekeeping. If I did, I'd take it like a shot. But I don't."

"You prefer to be an office clerk?"

"Since you put it that way, yes. I shouldn't care particularly for stenography—though I shall learn it; but this is a little bit different."

"You mean more exciting?"

She considered, and took another sandwich, biting into it reflectively.

"I suppose that is part of it," she admitted after a

moment; "but haven't I a right to prefer excitement—if I do? As between a job that bores me and one that interests me, haven't I a right to choose?"

"And I have no voice in the matter?"

Lucia drank her ginger ale.

"You're making this rather hard, father," she observed, "but you force me to it, you see. Do you mean that you called me into the world to keep house for you from thirty to—fifty, say?"

"Lucia!"

"They don't mean to be so brutal—but, what can they do?" thought the younger man, shaking his head as the father winced.

"All right, then; but what do you mean?" she cried. "Prison reform does interest me more than mending alcohol lamps. I like the detail of organization and everybody says I'm born for that sort of thing——"

"Born for it—great God!" her father groaned.

"You think I was born for scolding the butler, then?" She flashed a hostile eye over them both. "Not my own butler—I never should have one—but some man's butler?"

In the quiet room the sexes met head-on and clashed audibly, like steel. The furtive, fostered hate of many silent generations shot up into a rank, vindictive growth between those three; and Lutie—unconscious, gray-eyed Lutie, as innocent of the primal oppression as any other American princess on her twentieth-century pedestal—offered herself, a fresh and virgin battleground, for the fight.

"Miss Stanchon means," Fettauer threw across lightly, "that she would rather attend to the butler after he has been committed for stealing the silver than before that ceremony!"

Lucia faced him. "I suppose you said that with the intention of being funny," she said. "As a matter of fact, it happens to be strictly true. I *would* rather!"

"Very often when I say funny things they are strictly true," he returned composedly. "It's a way I have. . . . *You can't bully me, my lady!*" he thought.

Fettauer laughed shortly and the elder man stared heavily at them. How young they were—how facile with the emotions that exhausted him! And how they understood each other!

"Does it seem to you, Lucia," Stanchon began carefully, "that a little more personal care given to the butler, as a butler, might keep him from prison? It's a little matter you ladies seem to overlook nowadays."

"Very well played, doctor!" the young man applauded mentally.

Lucia uncrossed her knees.

"I know. We're always hearing that," she answered slowly. "But servants have always stolen things, it seems to me, father. Didn't they ever steal when Aunt Judy ran the house? And she never had a thought beyond them—and foreign missions. You never objected to all that missionary talk, father."

"No! Because it was just talk!" he flung at her. Fettauer burst into unaffected laughter and the elder man flushed.

"Well, I can't help it—it was!" he repeated obstinately. "If you think it helps your side, all right; but it was no eight-hours-a-day job!"

"I suppose that's why we're not much interested in missionaries now," Lucia reflected. "It seems so silly, with all these strikes and—and tuberculosis and—and everything."

"I wouldn't waste much discussion on the missionaries,

moment; "but haven't I a right to prefer excitement—if I do? As between a job that bores me and one that interests me, haven't I a right to choose?"

"And I have no voice in the matter?"

Lucia drank her ginger ale.

"You're making this rather hard, father," she observed, "but you force me to it, you see. Do you mean that you called me into the world to keep house for you from thirty to—fifty, say?"

"Lucia!"

"They don't mean to be so brutal—but, what can they do?" thought the younger man, shaking his head as the father winced.

"All right, then; but what do you mean?" she cried. "Prison reform does interest me more than mending alcohol lamps. I like the detail of organization and everybody says I'm born for that sort of thing——"

"Born for it—great God!" her father groaned.

"You think I was born for scolding the butler, then?" She flashed a hostile eye over them both. "Not my own butler—I never should have one—but some man's butler?"

In the quiet room the sexes met head-on and clashed audibly, like steel. The furtive, fostered hate of many silent generations shot up into a rank, vindictive growth between those three; and Lutie—unconscious, gray-eyed Lutie, as innocent of the primal oppression as any other American princess on her twentieth-century pedestal—offered herself, a fresh and virgin battleground, for the fight.

"Miss Stanchon means," Fettauer threw across lightly, "that she would rather attend to the butler after he has been committed for stealing the silver than before that ceremony!"

Lucia faced him. "I suppose you said that with the intention of being funny," she said. "As a matter of fact, it happens to be strictly true. I *would* rather!"

"Very often when I say funny things they are strictly true," he returned composedly. "It's a way I have. . . . *You can't bully me, my lady!*" he thought.

Fettauer laughed shortly and the elder man stared heavily at them. How young they were—how facile with the emotions that exhausted him! And how they understood each other!

"Does it seem to you, Lucia," Stanchon began carefully, "that a little more personal care given to the butler, as a butler, might keep him from prison? It's a little matter you ladies seem to overlook nowadays."

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"I wouldn't waste much discussion on the missionaries,

doctor," Fettauer warned gently, "because, as an example to Miss Stanchon, they seem—they seem to leave a little something to be desired!"

"I know—I know!" said Lutie's father wearily. "It is only that Judy believed in them—strangely enough—and, as a matter of fact, gave a great deal of her time and money to them."

"And she gave a great deal of time to knitting afghans, too," Lutie began suddenly. "Whenever anybody had a baby, Aunt Judy made it an afghan. And somebody was always having one." Her detached tone gave all the effect of a reference to the habits of some curious, extinct species.

"But, you see, dad, she could always drop the afghan any minute if anything serious happened in the house, just as she'd drop the missionary business. It could wait. And then she'd pick them up again. But this work that I'm interested in can't be treated that way. It's all—it's all laid out, don't you see? Everybody has a thing to see to; and it's so fascinating; and we're all working so hard; and it's growing so terribly fast—and if anybody drops out some one has to substitute, or all the time and energy is wasted. I mean to say——"

"Efficiency is what she means, doctor, and team-play," Fettauer suggested.

"Yes—team-play," Lutie agreed gratefully. "I'm planning for it all the while, father, and I can't stop and be thrown off the track just for an alcohol-lamp!"

She looked earnestly at him, her heart in the smoke-blue eyes; and he smiled at her, fatherly again and whimsical.

"He thinks she's begging! Oh, why can't the generations understand each other, ever?" thought the young doctor.

"And you think, Max, here, can? You don't mind throwing him off the track?"

"He offered," said Lutie shortly.

"And you don't feel that it's undignified to let him? Don't you see, my dear, that you're behaving like two different kinds of women? One business man shouldn't interfere with another. When your Aunt Judy used to send me on all sorts of foolish errands I could afford to smile and——"

"And forget them," Lutie interrupted rudely. "I know! She was always scolding about it. Now Doctor Fettauer will smile—and remember it."

"Yes, because he is in love with you and I wasn't with Judy!" thought her harassed father.

"Well, well!" he said aloud. "Let's go to bed. Will you have a taxi, Max? I only meant, Lutie, that if you could manage to give even an hour a day—regularly——" He reached over and quietly blew out the guttering candles.

"Just stay with us while we last, child," he said. "We're like those—nearly out, anyway."

He held out his hands amicably; but the young man, even as he grasped one of them, shook his head. *"He'll make her hate him!"* he thought. And, indeed, Lucia was far from reaching for the other hand he reached to her.

"Father!" she cried, and stood flushed and far from him. "Why will you take that tone? It's not fair! Do you seriously mean that all my life, spent as you wish it, is the least I can do to pay for everything? Then I'm in a trap!"

"My child," said her father, grave now, and master naturally of an excited woman, "you put your own interpretations——"

"Oh, very well, father! What interpretations shall I put?"

She was openly hostile now.

"Surely, Lucia, to ask for an hour a day spent in my house——"

"Oh, nonsense!" She moved unconsciously to the door and stood in front of it, barring their way. "It's no use, dad; we've got to have this out," she said.

The men waited in silence.

"It isn't so much the hour," she began quietly. "I could squeeze that in, I suppose. It's the point of view. That is to be the real work, that hour, according to you; and then I can fill in with the other—or anything else I choose. Is that right?"

"Quite right," said Doctor Stanchon briefly.

"Then I'm afraid I can't agree."

"She speaks to him as if he were a stranger!" thought the young man.

"I'm thirty years old, father," Lucia went on dispassionately, "and it's no use treating me like a schoolgirl. I know I seem one to you, but I'm not. If I had married at twenty-five, say, you wouldn't have had any idea of dictating to me, would you?"

"Of course not, Lucia; but that's just the point—you didn't."

"No. I didn't. Do you know why?" Lucia asked.

"How should I know, my child?" her father answered wearily. "You never speak of those things to me."

"I'm going to now," she said.

The men sat, their eyes on her steadily—hers fixed on the smoking candles.

"There have been only two men—that were possible," she said rather low and a little breathless but utterly

determined now—"Van Wynken and—and one other. You always liked Van, father?"

"Always, Lucia. At first I thought——"

"I know. I nearly did myself—usually after a dance. He gave me—well, feelings."

She lifted her eyes and met Fettauer's squarely. He nodded, comprehending. "Brave little girl!" he applauded.

"He asks me regularly and I laugh him off."

"But why, Lucia? But why?" her father cried eagerly. "If you knew how——"

"How delighted you'd be? I do," she assured him. "But I shouldn't be any older, father—I shouldn't be any better judge of how to spend my time—should I?"

"My dear child, you simply haven't any idea what you're talking about!"

"Oh, haven't I?" She shot a strange look at him. "How long are you going to keep on believing that, I wonder?" she said. "Won't you ever realize, father, that I'm a woman?"

"Of course he won't, Lucia," Fettauer interrupted sharply; "you're his daughter. There is only one thing that can make him realize it."

"And that is——" She stared at him.

"Your child in his arms," said the young man simply.

"Then you mean to say there are no women except ——"

"None from his point of view, my dear girl; so don't waste any strength over it," he said quietly.

She shook her shoulders like a young filly noosed in a lariat.

"Horrors!" she puffed out. They were silent. "Well —it wouldn't be Van's child!" she went on after a moment. "Do you know why? Because I'd have to

manage Van; and I'll never do that. It would take all my time!"

"Lucia!" cried the elder man, "do you realize what you're saying? Do you think you're anything but wantonly blind to your own——"

"At least she's telling you the truth, doctor!" Fettauer interposed warningly. "Don't be blind yourself and check her!"

"I'm not to check such topsyturvy nonsense? Max, when I think that I'm responsible for that child's mental training——"

"Oh, never mind!" said Lucia furiously. "Never mind, Doctor Fettauer. It's quite impossible, you see. He'll never change. The only way I can free myself from my obligations to one man, apparently, is to marry another! That lets me out!"

"And you backing her up!" cried Stanchon, whirling suddenly upon his guest. "You, Fettauer, when you know as well as I do——"

"I don't say I back her up exactly," said the young surgeon calmly. "I only say I see her point."

"Then you see more than I can," Doctor Stanchon returned shortly.

"Yes. That's what I've been trying to get into your head, doctor!" Nothing could have been more amiable than his tone; his eyes laughed. "Miss Stanchon is merely telling us that she cannot agree with your verdict of exempting her from all future claims and previous obligations in the event of her marriage, and holding her to both in the event of her deserting you for a career that interests her. She pleads that it is desertion in either case—or in neither! *N'est-ce-pas, mademoiselle?*"

Lucia nodded. Her lips were locked too tight for speech.

CROSS-FIRING

"You mentioned another man besides Van Wynken," said her father abruptly. "Who'd you mean, Lutie?"

She opened her lips, bit the lower one, then smiled a strange smile.

"It *is* you, isn't it, Max?" she asked with a swift, level look.

"I have always hoped so," he answered quickly.

"Afraid of managing him, too?"

Her father's voice was light, but his eyes were old and tired.

"No. I'm afraid he'd manage me!"

"And I'm not sure I want the job," Fettauer added thoughtfully.

At this Stanchon threw up his hands in the air.

"I give you both up!" he cried, half mocking, half serious. "If this is modern love-making, thank heaven I've had my day!"

"When would you have asked me, Max?" Lucia pursued interestedly—it was to both of them, evidently, as if they were alone in the room.

"Sometime when I couldn't help it, I suppose," he answered.

"I doubt very much if I ever marry," she said thoughtfully, swinging one hip from the arm of the chair she perched on. "The man who would be good for me I wouldn't want, and the man I'd want probably wouldn't be good for me!"

"Of course one never knows about that sort of thing," Fettauer assented politely, "until one has tried."

"And then it's too late?"

She swept a questioning glance at him from under her lashes.

"Not necessarily," he returned with composure.

She laughed nervously.

"Well, father?" Stanchon squared himself. "It's ten minutes after one," she said. "I have to be at the office at nine and I'm going to Boston on the noon express. It's there I can have that fifteen-hundred-dollar job I told you about. I only mentioned it to let you see that I really was worth something in the open market. If you don't like the idea, and really object seriously to my leaving home, I'm willing to stay and take my allowance; but I want you to agree that it's just to keep me from going that you pay it, not in consideration of my services as housekeeper—which I don't pretend to be! I—I can't have you feeling that I'm taking your money and falling down on my job, father—I simply can't!"

"That is what I must feel, Lucia—since you put it in this way yourself. I never could have." Stanchon's jaw shot out; his voice was very hard, though his eyes met no one's. "I should rather have depended on your love, my dear, and let the ethics of the situation go; but if it is to be reduced to dollars and cents—what does your allowance stand for in your opinion?"

"I don't think it will stand for much, after to-night!"

All the blue faded from Lutie's eyes and left them agate gray and pitiless.

"They hate each other!" thought Max Fettauer. *"How true the Greek tragedies are!"*

"Lucia, do you seriously mean that without my consent you will go to Boston on this wild-goose chase?"

"I assure you I should be much wilder and infinitely more of a goose if I stayed here!" she said flippantly.

"And if you fail——"

"Oh, if I fail I can always marry," she answered with a reckless little laugh. "That's the only respectable meal-ticket from your point of view, apparently! Do you realize, dad, that in case I couldn't earn my living and

you refused to train me for it now—and I hated this housekeeping business—you'd be forcing me into marrying some one—any one—to get away from home?"

"My God, Lucia, don't talk that way!"

"I'm sorry, father, but that's what it comes to in the end, doesn't it?"

"How about housekeeping after you'd married?"

"Oh, that doesn't follow. Marie Fitch earns enough to pay a woman to do it, and Randall says it's fifty per cent. better done than she ever did it."

Her father controlled himself with an obvious effort.

"My dear Lucia, I have never allowed myself to criticize your extraordinary preference for women so much older than yourself," he began, choosing his words carefully.

"I have particularly guarded myself from discussing Mrs. Varnham, for instance, for the very reason that I do not pretend to like or understand her, and I would not for the world seem to you to be unjust to her. I realize that she has a strong personality, and that her direct, brusque manner has a curious charm for women. But in Marie Fitch's case, it is different. I *don't* dislike her; quite the contrary. And I am very sincerely sorry for her. She has a worthless husband, and she's been a brave little woman. Every man I know respects her and the fight she's made, and is proud of her success. In one way I'm delighted to have you know a woman who has achieved such a business reputation and put herself at the head of her profession."

Lucia's eyes glowed loyally.

"But I shall deeply regret the association," he went on soberly, "if you propose to model your views upon her family life."

Lucia shrugged impatiently.

"If Randall Fitch and his wife are your ideal of a successful marriage——"

"They're about up to the average, so far as I can see," said Lutie wearily. "If it isn't one thing it's another. I can't say I'm so crazy about this marriage business, you know!"

Her father looked long at her—mutinous, hard, and a little haggard under her soft girlish fillet. It seemed to the young man as if a bit of flowery, velvet turf had been turned back in the meadow path and disclosed the buried corruption of some ancient graveyard of the race—a pit so full of obscure sex hatred and bitter misunderstandings that all the kindly earth of all the generations could not sweeten it.

"The air of the new age must blow in on it and disclose all these secret and brutal crypts," he mused, and pitied them both.

"Fettauer," said the doctor at length, and his voice came toneless and aged across the polished table, with its embroidered cloth and bowl of gold and green and crimson fruit—"Fettauer, my daughter is thirty years old and I have never really known her until to-night!"

"You have never thought about her as a woman until to-night," said the young man in an impersonal tone, "that's all! Up to now you have seen only your daughter—I suppose that is something like your arm or your cheek. But of course she is a separate organism."

The doctor drooped his head upon his arms suddenly, with a broken movement that checked their hearts a moment—it was so final, so pitiful, so defeated.

"It's because her mother died!" he muttered and hid his face.

Lucia drew a long breath and clenched her hands, but

did not move or sob. The younger man felt as if he were witnessing some cunningly staged play; they all appeared to be taking up their cues, gliding in an appointed, orderly fashion through shifting scenes prepared long ago.

"This is all dreadfully sad, but it doesn't wring us, somehow," he thought critically. *"And it really isn't because her mother died—necessarily."*

Lutie's voice echoed his thought.

"I don't think you can say that, father. Betty Girard's mother is living, and she practically disowned Betty when she went to Paris to study art. She told me what a terrible time they had—and her mother's very proud of her now; but they didn't speak for two years."

The doctor raised his head and his face was quite composed.

"It won't come to that with us, child," he said very low. "You're all I have, you know. There are no theories can stand against that. Will you kiss me, Lutie?"

She slipped from the chair and ran to him very lightly, very surely. The flowery turf slipped back into place and there was no sign of the festering gulf beneath. She laid one firm round arm over his shoulder.

"We'll find a way, dad," she said. "It will work out all right!"

Stanchon pressed the pink-palmed hand with the shining nails and relaxed himself; but Fettauer deserted suddenly from the alliance of youth he shared with this girl back into the primeval army of his sex.

"She's beaten us!" he cried to himself. *"By God, we've lost!"*

The sharp ting of the doctor's telephone moved them from the silence that wrapped the three; each of them,

sunk in a deep dream, worn out with the recent struggle, started nervously.

"That's the hospital!" And Stanchon was on his feet as lightly as a boy. "That fellow has come to himself, I do believe—I told them to call me at any hour. Want to see him, Max? We can step across and back in half an hour." He answered the tinkle with a brief: "All right!"

"Then you can just step across by yourself, father!" Lutie cried childishly. "I'm too dead tired to go to bed and I won't stay awake here all alone. Go and see your man and hurry back—and leave Doctor Fettauer here. I'll commit suicide if you both go away now!"

They glanced keenly at her; her face was drawn and white.

"Poor child!" the young man thought. *"How it takes it out of them!"*

"Well," her father agreed doubtfully, "if you can't go to bed, my dear——"

"I shall come with you if you don't leave him here," she said doggedly. "I can't very well drag Potts out of bed—he says his hours are too long anyway!"

Fettauer laughed outright.

"Hurry along, doctor," he said. "I'd like to see your man, but I have too much pity for a downtrodden butler not to stay!"

Stanchon shouldered into a greatcoat produced from a mysterious closet beside the mantel. With the hospital call, elasticity and good humor seemed to have flowed into him; the years fell away from his face.

"You can't say I'm not a modern parent!" he flung at them from the door. "What would your poor Aunt Judy have said—eh, Lutie? But I've learned my lesson.

If I had a son of thirty I'd leave him here, Fettauer; so why not a daughter! Is that the idea?"

But Lutie, only smiling wanly, collapsed in her chair.

"She's at the end of her rope," the young man decided.

"Don't be long, doctor," he said quietly.

"No, no." The door closed, then opened again. "Couldn't you marry him, Lutie?" he begged, like a mischievous boy.

"I'm not sure I want to marry her—just now, doctor," Fettauer returned placidly. "She'd have to wait, anyhow!"

The doctor snorted and closed the door violently. They heard him clatter down the stairs; the house-door jarred through the halls.

CHAPTER III

The Show-Down

FETTAUER walked over and sat on the arm of her chair.

"Poor little Lucia!" he said gently.

Her eyes were closed; she bent her drooping lips into a tiny, tired smile.

"I'm all in!" she murmured at length after what seemed a long silence. "Can you make me a Scotch-and-soda?"

"I can," said he, still speaking very low, "but I don't believe I will. It's not what you want at all, you know."

"I know it's the only thing on earth that can get me out of this chair!"

"As a matter of fact, it's not, though," he persisted. "This alcohol game is the very devil for you, my dear girl! Don't you know that in just the proportion it stimulates it depresses—later? And when you're at your present point of exhaustion it's the worst of all. Will you let me make you something else?"

"Anything," she whispered.

He dropped cube-sugar into one of the tall glasses and poured water slowly over it.

"This would pull an elephant out of nervous prostration, you know," he remarked casually. "The French use a great deal of nervous force and you laugh at them for their extremely practical method of recuperating it—

you're always laughing at nations for the wrong reason in America! Sip it slowly."

She obeyed, with ugly, boyish grimaces.

"Probably the elephant would prefer nervous prostration to seasickness!" she suggested, halfway through the glass, but he shook his head.

"It won't make you sick," he said briefly.

By the time she handed him the empty goblet there was a faint pink under her eyes that smiled at him gratefully.

"You're a good little doctor, and you can trot along now," she said. "Perhaps you can catch dad after all."

"Perhaps," said he.

She got up from the chair and leaned over the back of it, facing him.

"It was dreadfully hard, Max," she said.

The pupils of her eyes grew slowly darker and widened. He looked full into them.

"I know," he answered.

"I feel like a brute; but what could I do?"

"Nothing but what you did, my dear girl," he replied.

"After we die, you know, I don't believe there's anything else—do you?"

"No."

"Then here I am—thirty, and there are only so many years, Max!"

"Only so many years!" he repeated gravely.

"There are people—lots of them, I know—who would think I am beastly and selfish—that I ought to give up—that I owe it to him——"

"I am not one of them," said Max Fettauer steadily.

She drew a long breath.

"That helps a lot," she said.

They looked at each other; the tall mahogany clock struck twice.

"For heaven's sake! Get out now—and thank you for everything. I'm dead with sleep and I must be called at eight. Good night!"

They shook hands heartily.

"Good night!" he said. "I'm glad you're rested."

Her firm warm fingers held his frankly.

"And I'm sorry about—about the other thing," she said, hardly blushing, with kind, friendly eyes. "You see, I can't do it. I shouldn't make a success of it, and you're too valuable a person for me to spoil! I should have got into that game earlier if I'd been going to play it; and I don't think it's fair to drop into it later just because—just because I'm tired. . . . You see what I mean? You do see, Max?"

"I see perfectly," said he. "And anyway you're not tired—yet."

"No, I'm not tired—yet," she repeated contentedly. "I'm just beginning, really."

"Yes," said he, "you're just beginning. I wish you luck, my dear!"

She put out her other hand impulsively and they stood, swinging.

"What a brick you are!" she cried.

Their eyes met, grappled a moment, and they leaned unconsciously nearer. All the blue rushed back to her eyes and her hands grew warm in his. They leaned closer——

"You don't really mean it," he said evenly, "do you, now?"

He had never seen her flush so deeply. She drew her hands back.

"I—I suppose not," she said, and bit her lip. "Good

night! Can you let yourself out? Everybody's in bed."

He went down the stairs and she stood for a moment watching his straight, military back. Then she turned and went up, waiting on the landing to stretch her arms above her head in a great irresistible yawn.

"Lord, I'm tired!" she breathed, and sank suddenly on the curve of the landing, staring ahead of her.

Fettauer pulled on his coat, settled his hat, hunted vaguely for his stick, which was not in its usual corner, and swore softly to himself in German. He fumbled among the umbrellas, lifted the heavy motor coats about, kicked the card table in a wave of nervous irritation, then grasped the slender malacca suddenly, turned the knob of the heavy door, opened it and crossed the threshold. Even as the latch clicked he heard her cry:

"Oh, Doctor Fettauer! Doctor——"

He dropped stick and gloves and ran up the stairs, terrified at the anguish in her voice.

"Coming! Coming!" he called, and took the steps two at a bound. She was stepping down to meet him, leaning heavily on the rail; all the light had gone from her face. As he stopped just below her, panting slightly, she put her hand on his shoulder, and when his covered it he found it cold.

"I thought I might as well tell you now and get it over," she said dully. "I've changed my mind."

"Your mind? Changed?"

She looked down at him from her higher stair.

"Yes," she said. "It's no use—I can't do it. He's my father, and—Oh, did you see his face when he—when he——"

"Yes, yes; I know," he soothed her. "You're tired. He was tired. It was hard all round. In the morning——"

"In the morning I'll tell him," she interrupted. "It's no use. I'm simply not good for it, Max—I wouldn't dare! I'm all he has in the world. If he wants me to attend to the old alcohol-lamp, I will. I don't think it's fair—but I will!"

"My dear girl!"

He stared at her, amazed, touched, thrilled to the center of his heart.

"It's got to be done, what I told him," she went on in that dry, toneless voice; "but somebody else must do it—not me! If only he had a wife, or something; but he's only got me!"

"Only you," he echoed, staring at her.

"When I was twelve and had scarlet fever, he thought I was dying once—I'll never forget it!—the pain in his eyes—it was like a big, hurt dog! Oh, Max, why must it all come on the women?"

"I don't know. It always has," he answered thickly.

"And yet, I have the right!" she burst out. "You can't say I haven't! Did he buy me, soul and body, when he became my father? It isn't that he isn't kindness itself—he adores me!"

"I know! I know!"

"And yet—he breaks me! Is it fair? Say it isn't, Max! Say it's——"

"It is life," he said; "it is just life. That's all."

"Then love is a terrible thing," she said quietly, and put her hands on his shoulders.

"It has always been, my dear," said he.

"You think I'm a coward! You think I'm going back on the others that I planned to help!" she cried, and her lips quivered. "I never thought it would be this way! I played the game—I played it fair; but when it comes to a showdown—Oh, Max, I haven't the nerve!

I'll do what he wants and fit in my work as I can—and of course I can do a lot. But—all the flavor will be gone, Max; all the point is lost. All my pride in it is broken—to save his! Because I'm all he has."

"You are all any human being could ever need—or want," he muttered.

"You don't blame me? You don't despise me?" she asked sadly.

He laughed unsteadily and lifted her hands away from his shoulders.

"My dear! My dear!" he began, then grasped hard on the polished rail. "If women were not blind," he said, shaking his head at her, "what would happen, I wonder? Or is your stupidity your wisdom? If anything so wonderful as that nature of yours, my dearest little girl, were trained to its capacity—God! the world would be your plaything!"

"Good night, Max," she said, "and goodbye! I'm glad it's all over." She threw back her head defiantly. "But listen to me!" she cried, vibrating. "It won't be so always, I tell you! It shan't be! Girls won't be held so always! Our daughters sha'n't suffer so—for we've learned! This is the last generation, I tell you, Max Fettauer! Our daughters shall live their own lives——"

He drew a deep breath and caught her down to him, holding her hard on his knee. He turned his lips to hers and kissed her through his answer.

"Yes, sweetheart—*our* daughters shall!" he whispered.

CHAPTER IV

The Clouds Gather

DR. STANCHON'S delight in Lucia's engagement "positively melted the snow and thawed New York into spring," as Mrs. Ranny Fitch picturesquely phrased it. Through a trying January, the month that spelled bronchitis and pneumonia for so many of his old friends, Dick Stanchon's hand-grip warmed and strengthened even beyond its ordinary, his eyes beamed more kindly and whimsically than ever before.

"Well, I suppose you know about Max and Lutie?" shot like a spray of oxygen across the languid air of the sick-room.

To-day, in his office, he was able to regard almost sympathetically even the recent vagaries of Mr. Randall Fitch, as related with characteristically averted eyes by his wife.

"And you don't think that Ranny's really sick at all, then?"

The doctor drew a long breath. He was necessarily a patient man, but he sometimes regretted that he had not adopted the furious manner of a famous colleague, who had once confided to him that his professional rages were the result of careful practice before his shaving mirror!

"I should hardly put it like that, Mrs. Fitch," he said. "Randall is a highly strung fellow and he's under a

great deal of strain just now. I prescribed two afternoons a week at the Country Club, a year ago, and at first he was very faithful to it——"

"Oh, at first! Ranny's faithful to everything—at first," she interrupted lightly.

He met her side-glance steadily.

"Try to keep him constant to golf, at least, my dear," he said.

They looked at each other for a moment curiously, appraisingly. Her lips parted, the pupils of her dark, snapping eyes dilated, softening them unbelievably, and her hands, lightly clenched, as always, relaxed and turned palm upward in her lap.

"She's going to say something she'll regret," the doctor thought quickly, *"and it won't help her, really."*

"Dr. Stanchon," she began desperately, "I don't know how much you know——"

"Many of my patients are convinced that I am clairvoyant," he interrupted gently, "but I am sure they are quite wrong. Or, at least, that my clairvoyance is directly related to that of the other 'mediums,' who have learned a great deal about human nature from the only teacher in the world."

"And that is——" she was still on the verge of her gulf of confession, but she had herself in hand.

"Experience," he said. "If the fifty-five years that I have lived have taught me anything, it is just that they, and they only—those fifty-five years—are what I have learned! Nobody else's years ever really taught me anything, I am convinced. And nobody else's years can teach you," he added meaningly.

"That's very hard," she said, and again her eyes dilated and her upturned palms quivered slightly.

"It is," he agreed. "It is very hard. And stones are

very hard. And to live wisely is very hard. And yet stones and wise people are necessary to hold the world together—they are the bones of the world, in fact."

Her hands slipped unconsciously into their normal tense lines; her eyes brightened with interest, and she straightened in her high, carved chair.

"She's all right, now," he thought with relief.

"But that's very clever—what you say," she cried, "why don't you write? I always wondered."

He smiled, pleased, in spite of himself.

"We're always writing, we old fellows," he said, "writing good habits on the scrawled, worn, creased gray tissue that our sulky pupils carry up here," and he touched his vigorous, silver-thatched skull lightly. "They hold out their copy-books very patiently, while they're in the class-room, and say that they understand, and that they will follow the lines; but as soon as they've left us, the leaves slip into the old, easy shapes, and the deep black marks they've made so many times show through the copy, and they're at their old pot-hooks again!"

"All the same, you ought to write, really!" she persisted. "I love that pamphlet, 'The Dynamics of Sleep,' that you sent Ranny."

"Did Ranny love it?"

She blushed.

"He said he hadn't time," she admitted. "He's perfectly incorrigible, you know. Brokers get so dreadfully rushed. I wish Randall Fitch would mind you as well as Lucia did. But Randall won't even give up red meats ——"

"My dear girl, Randall can eat red meats or blue meats or—or Scotch plaid meats, if he'll play golf twice a week! Lucia tells me she tried to coax him onto the

links last week, but there was 'nothing doing,' as my daughter's generation so elegantly puts it."

Marie Fitch's one real beauty—her milkwhite, even teeth—flashed out between her thin, nervous lips.

"Lucia is too amusing," she said, "with her new rôle of Parent's Assistant! I suppose she works as hard at your out-patients as she used to for us on the Board?"

"Not quite, I hope," he said gravely, "for that blessed Board of yours was swallowing her up alive. And she hasn't deserted you, has she, really? I didn't understand it so."

"Oh, no," she answered, her hand on the door, "of course not. But it's quite different, now that she's resigned the chairmanship and comes in under the five-hour-a-week by-law. She's invaluable, wherever she works, but it's very different, for it used to be her life, really, Dr. Stanchon, and now it's just one of her interests—like your patients."

"Thank God for that!" he cried briskly, "the day when young women of Lucia's age and type make prison-reform-committees 'their life' will be a sad day for the next generation, Mrs. Marie! Thirty is no age for abstract causes, my dear."

"What age is?" she challenged him. "According to you, women would never accomplish anything abstract!"

"According to me, it certainly seems a distinct waste of their natural capacities," he returned placidly, "though I haven't the least objection to their devoting themselves to the world in general, before and after their chances for peopling the world in particular have either failed to arrive or ceased to exist."

Her eyes flashed dangerously and her lips tightened.

"It's men like you, Dr. Stanchon, that have kept us back for centuries!" she shot at him, "and since we're

on the subject, I tell you very frankly that I think you are abominably selfish to play on Lucia's feelings as a daughter and take her out of the movement she practically started and wanted to give her life to!"

"My dear Mrs. Fitch," he said quietly, "I had something to do with Lucia's life (a detail you ladies appear to forget, occasionally, if I may venture to suggest it!) and I did not wish to see it given to reforming her country's prison system. I was bold enough to feel that Providence had other and wiser ends in view for Lucia. But I am far from feeling that the work she was doing was useless or harmful. Mrs. Varnham's little daughter has been set to work on the Junior Committee with my full consent, and, as regards yourself, have I ever placed a straw in your way?"

"Because I'm forty-five and Nancy's fifteen, I suppose!" she said scornfully.

"Precisely. Because you are forty-five and Nancy's fifteen. Her youth and enthusiasm are taken out of herself and focused on a large abstract cause, with the best results. Your experienced maturity—your very disillusionments"—he looked keenly into her eyes—"make you an admirable balance-wheel for many women who have not your excuse for leisure. Far from contesting your self-imposed activities, I should be glad to profit by their enlargement: I wish I had you on the hospital board."

Appeased in spite of herself, she only smiled nervously.

"But the real reason you abandon me to civic work is not my usefulness—but my *forty-fiveness!*"

"Your forty-fiveness, yes," he answered simply.

They looked at each other silently, till her eyes dropped slowly, weighted with their tears. Suddenly

she lifted them defiantly and stepped back into the room.

"I suppose you think it's my fault that we hadn't any children," she said in a dull, strangled voice, "but, as a matter of fact, it isn't—we shouldn't have minded, ever! And of late years . . . we've been very sorry. . . ."

He rose and took her hand. "I know, Marie, I know," he said gently, "those things are very hard."

She returned his solid grip for a moment, then, quite openly, dabbled at her eyes with her embroidered handkerchief.

"You're an angel," she said lightly, "and it's all in the day's work, I haven't a doubt. In return, I'm going to do something for you."

"For me?"

It was time for him to go, but only a very clever woman could have guessed it.

"I'm going to tell you something," she said shortly, and the clairvoyance of which he had been accused possessed him suddenly and warned his sensitive nerves that he was to hear something well worth a delayed appointment.

"Very well," he answered seriously, "tell me. And shall we sit down?"

"No, it won't take a minute," she assured him. "It's hard, but soon over, doctor. And we're all so fond of Lucia."

"Lucia?" he was all attention: her hand was still in his.

"Does Max Fettauer talk freely to you, Dr. Stanchon —intimately, I mean?"

"More so than to anyone else, I imagine. Why?"

"Because, if it is possible for you to warn him not to be too frank with Lucia, I happen to know that it will save him a great deal of trouble."

"Too frank? Too frank?" he queried, staring at her, "what about?"

She sighed impatiently.

"Oh, what do you suppose?" she said, "the tariff? Or the *tango*, perhaps?"

"Both are subjects of the day, certainly," he suggested mechanically, searching her eyes.

"But the subject I refer to was a subject of the day before the tariff or the *tango* was born or thought of," she told him, "and as, by a curious coincidence, I know the views of the three principal parties concerned, and see that they are diametrically opposed, I'm a little worried about the situation: I hadn't supposed there could be any new development in the relations of those three parties, but it seems I was wrong: there's always room for one more kink."

"Three parties?" he repeated vaguely, "what three parties?"

"Why, Lucia and Max—and the other woman!" she said sharply.

He breathed deep and sat down in his chair.

"Of course you'll tell me all about this, Marie?" he said quietly.

"On the contrary," she answered, "I sha'n't, doctor. I'm put in a very difficult position, you see: I hardly know Doctor Fettauer, but I know Lucia—and the other woman. Nothing that I know from *her* would ever go any further, of course: that was a confidence, and no complications of Lucia's would move me to betray the tiniest bit of it.

"But, as regards Lucia, it's different. What I happened to hear her say was more or less public: that is, she was giving her views to a lot of us together, and I can't see any harm in repeating them, as any one of the

women that were there is quite likely to quote them. Fettauer's views I don't know, but I judge from what I have heard that they aren't likely to be Lucia's.

"Now, I know a little more about the three sides of this affair than anybody else, I imagine, and so I'm warning you to warn Doctor Fettauer to go very lightly over the confidences I understand he intends to make, because they won't have the effect he intends or expects —owing to his fiancée's somewhat extraordinary views— which I happen to have heard. D'you see?"

Stanchon sat hard in his chair and fixed her with a noncommittal eye.

"Do I understand that there is a woman who has claims upon Max?"

"Not at all," she replied imperturbably, "nobody has a shadow of a claim upon him, so far as I know."

"Nor presses any claim?"

"Not the slightest."

"He feels bound, then?—So far as you know, of course: I don't admit that any of this is fact, till I hear it from his lips, you know."

"Oh, that's all right, Doctor Stanchon," she assured him, "I know just how you feel. You've got your daughter to fight for. But you're quite off the track. Doctor Max doesn't feel in the least bound, and, of course, isn't. No, no, it's more bothersome than that—it's Lucia."

"Lucia?" he repeated helplessly, "Lucia?"

"Oh, Lord!" she sighed, "what a fool one is, to do this sort of thing, ever! Only I *did* think that if a word to Max *would* do, it might save a lot of trouble. And it seems so silly to have things that are past and gone spoil people's happiness—and Lucia *is* so obstinate!"

The doctor stared at her reflectively.

"It sometimes seems to me that I understand women

less and less," he said at last. "Do you really suppose, my dear, that I can talk to Max about all this?"

"Why not," she asked, "he's very fond of you."

"I think, perhaps, men are fond of each other just because we don't ask those questions," he told her.

"As for Lucia, if she's supposed to be ignorant of these circumstances, how can I speak to her? And for yourself, if your lips are sealed (I should say, quite properly) where do we accomplish anything?"

"Unless Max speaks to you," she persisted, "and I believe he will. Or Lucia might."

"Oh, no," he said sadly, "Lutie's my daughter, you know."

She turned to go.

"Well," she murmured, "perhaps it's not *all* bad, not having children! That's what Ranny says. And I'm not going to apologize, Doctor Stanchon, for worrying you, because you're certain to hear of it, you know. Those things never blow over, and at least you'll have time to make up your mind."

"I'm afraid *my* mind won't matter so much," he said gravely, "but I appreciate your telling me, all the same."

He closed the door gently behind her and dropped back into his chair, staring at Lucia's picture on his desk. It was his favorite photograph, taken at sixteen, with a sleek heavy braid over each confident young shoulder, and unabashed eyes under the slanting "Empress Eugenie" brows. Even then she had been distinctly of the stocky, pony type of woman, rounded and strong at once, square on her feet, ready for anything. It was impossible to condole with Lucia as a motherless girl: adoring aunts and a wise father had filled the place she had never felt to be vacant. Born at a period when tomboys were really fashionable, healthy as a young

prize-fighter, soundly educated and cushioned with friends, her fifteen years of life since that pig-tailed photograph was taken had hardly changed her from the fearless child that looked out at her father from the silver frame.

"She's never really had a check," he mused. *"Is it going to come this way? I'm afraid she'll take it hard, poor child!"*

CHAPTER V

The Storm Breaks

AT luncheon he studied her carefully: were those dark rings under her eyes, or only the shadows of the dark New York dining-room? Was her voice a little flat and tired, or were those the tones she dedicated to Potts, "the worst hated butler in New York," in Max Fettauer's phrase? Lucia had always been a little unnecessarily severe with servants.

"Is this the best the cook can do?" she inquired icily, turning over a rather thin chop with a scornful fork.

"I'll inquire, Miss Stanchon."

"Because if it is, I'll have some cold meat. If the doctor is willing to eat that sort of stuff, all right—I'm not."

"Very good, Miss Stanchon. I'll tell her."

"And if that smell of burning I catch when you open the door is the *soufflée,* Potts, you might add that I'll have some *compote* and macaroons—you needn't serve it at all."

"Yes, miss. Very good."

"Really, my dear, I think you're a little hard on Katharine?"

Lucia scowled.

"You don't understand the situation at all, father. There's a mission on at St. Vincent's, and that woman is out at all hours. I don't care how religious she is, naturally, but there is a limit, and every single thing

she's cooked this week has been burned. It's simply got to stop."

Potts brought in a small, apologetic omelet and murmured something about stewed apricots on account of the defective draught of the range and the lateness of the plumber's recent visit. Lucia sniffed haughtily and the incident would have been closed had not her father smiled quizzically at her and leaned over his elbows, refusing the expiatory macaroons with a nod.

"My dear," he said, "just what is Max's income, did you tell me?"

"I don't remember telling you," she returned, unyielding to the twinkle in his eyes, "but it's five thousand. Then he has twenty-five hundred of his own."

"And I can give you fifteen hundred. That's nine thousand a year. Now, that's not bad to begin on: your mother and I had hardly more than half of it and we weren't living in New York. But then, our ideas weren't yours—or Max's. The young men are spoiled, nowadays, you know. Don't you think it would be wise to begin to lower your ideals a little, in the matter of domestic service, Lutie? Things will be a little changed, you know. . . ."

"I'm not at all sure that there will be any change," she said, casually, but with one of her quick, characteristic side glances at him.

"You can serve the coffee in the library, Potts."

He caught his breath sharply.

"What do you mean, just?" he asked.

She followed him into the book-lined room, cheerful in the pale winter sunshine, with its flowering pots and snapping fire.

"The doctor detests that rock-candy, Potts—haven't you discovered it yet? Get some cube-sugar. And

please bring the silver service: I prefer to pour it myself. What were you saying, father?"

"I was asking what you meant by suggesting that there might not be any change," he answered patiently. There was only one way to take Lucia—her own.

"Oh!"

She dropped two bits of sugar into his pet "hundred-headed" cup and poured the fragrant coffee slowly over them. "Mattie Forsythe got a pot just like this for a bridge-prize yesterday," she observed, handing him his cup, "and now she's got to match it, she says, so she's furious.—I only meant that you may not get rid of me, after all."

"Lucia!"

"Dear me! Had you set your heart on it to that extent, dad? I'm sorry!"

"My dear girl, I think you know just about how much I want to lose you! But I honestly believed that Max was the safest man I know to trust you to. I mean, I thought you both stood a pretty fair chance. . . ."

"So did I," she admitted briefly, "but—I've changed my mind. That's all."

"O, that's all!"

"Well, isn't that enough?"

He drew a long black cigar slowly out of a special pocket: Lucia had used to call it his "consultation pocket."

"That depends," he said thoughtfully, "has Max changed his, too?"

She smiled easily—too easily—he thought.

"Hardly," she said.

"Is there any special reason, Lucia," he began carefully, "or perhaps you'd rather not discuss it?"

"Frankly, I wouldn't, father," she answered. "Not

because I mind, but because you would, and it wouldn't do any good. We've had it out, and it's all over, and we're perfectly good friends, and—and that's all."

"And you're thirty, and I'm sixty, and I couldn't understand, I suppose?"

She gulped down her coffee and went to the arm of his chair.

"Don't be silly, dad," she said brusquely, "it was only —to save you."

He put his arm around her, and stirred the melted sugar in his cup.

"When you have a son, dear," he began, "and he treats you like an elderly baby, you'll see how much you want to be saved! Suppose you tell me. You're all I've got, you know, and nobody's affairs on earth can interest me so much as yours—not even my own."

"I was afraid you'd feel that way," she acknowledged. "But I sha'n't have any son, father. They're a little too chancy—sons."

"Of course they are," he said promptly, "so is anything worth having! Do you suppose if a guarantee came with 'em, you'd bother with 'em?"

She smiled.

"There's something in that!" said she.

"There is, indeed," he assured her. "What makes women the greatest gamblers in the world, when they get into it? Because they've gambled in sons, since time began!"

"I notice you don't say daughters!"

"No, they're not quite such a gamble, fortunately," he answered, patting her shoulder.

"And yet every man wants a son?"

"Of course."

She got up from the arm of the chair and poured herself more coffee.

"The whole thing is frightfully unfair!" she burst out, and he settled back contentedly.

"She'll tell me, now," he thought.

"Dear girl," he said, "you are thirty years old, and fairly sensible, as things go. What's the use?"

"You'll see the use!" she threatened him, half mocking, half serious.

"You'll see the use, when we teach you to talk more about human beings—and less about men and women!"

"Then, my dear, mind that when *you* populate the globe, you produce human beings (they sound terribly Frankensteinish, somehow) and not—men and women!"

"Oh, I know what you mean," she threw at him, "but what can we do, as things are now? How can we help it?"

"You can't," he said placidly. "So—what's the use?"

She pressed her lips together and sat sullen.

"I understand then, Lutie, that you expected to marry a 'human being,' and found he was a man?"

"If you choose to put it that way—yes."

"You'll never find a finer man than Max Fettauer," said he.

"Possibly; I don't deny it."

"If only she'd rage about it, or cry!" he thought helplessly, *"but they're so hard, so hard!"*

"You know, Lucia," he went on, "at any rate, you can guess, that a man thinks pretty carefully before he shakes hands with his son-in-law. I went further than that. I hoped you and Max would see your way to each other before you did. And that day you told me last month was one of the happiest of my life. You've had a pretty free hand, you know, Lutie, and you're a little—a little

bit—well, when people said I spoiled you, perhaps I saw what they meant!"

She flashed a warm look into his eyes.

"That's all right, father," she said.

"At one time I thought it would be little Van Wynken. I shouldn't have been so well pleased, for—for many reasons. I knew a little too much about that family. Still, Van wasn't so bad, and I think you could have managed him. But Max—Ah, that was different. He understands you, Lucia. And he likes you for what you are, not what you look like, remember."

"Doesn't Van?"

"I doubt it. Van likes you because you're a healthy, good-looking young woman; because you like hockey and tennis, and because you can dance till three in the morning. And that's quite as it should be, and you know, of course, what all that really means?"

"Wh-what?"

Suddenly Lutie felt young, very young, and very much disposed of by fate.

"It means, my dear, simply that Van feels in you the possibility of producing healthy, happy children, who will all like hockey and tennis and dancing till three in the morning. That's all. And Nature tells Van that his family would be none the worse for several generations of that sort of children. He calls it being in love with you, and he's quite right, and a good boy, as boys go."

She was looking straight into the kind gray eyes that had colored her own, deeply interested, now.

"But Max, Lutie! That's different. He's a very unusually able man, Max Fettauer. And I firmly believe that his character and traditions will balance yours as perhaps no American's could. I didn't use to think so: I wasn't for international marriages. But I begin to

see that when a European has lived as many years in America as Fettauer, so that he understands our attitude to women, and realizes what he has to combat, if he loves the woman enough, he can do her a great deal of good."

"Ah! you mean, he can discipline her?"

"Marriage *is* discipline, dear," he said quietly. "That is why the people who avoid or miss it are nearly always a little too hard or a little too soft. Now you are from my point of view about as nice as a girl can be—but you're a little hard, my dear."

"And you had counted on Max to soften me?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I'm sorry for your theory, father, but he never will."

"Never, Lutie? That's a long word. And we've all heard of lovers' quarrels: mightn't this be one?"

"But we've not quarreled, father. You don't understand. If you must have it, it's this: I don't consider that Max is free to marry me, for someone else has a claim upon him—that's all."

"All? I should think it was quite enough, my dear!"

But there was no shock, and he honestly thanked Marie Fitch in his heart for sparing him from the first blow.

"And yet he feels free, himself? Max is a pretty fair sort of man, you know."

"Oh, fair!" her voice shook with displeasure. "He's fair for a man, I suppose you mean, not for a human being!"

"Aren't you just a little confused, dear? If there's any one situation in life which deals with men as men, and women as women, isn't this it?"

"And how does it deal with women as women?" she

demanded hotly. "That's just the point! It's all for Max to decide, apparently."

"It seems not to be, in this case, at any rate," he suggested peaceably, "for you're deciding it."

"You can bet I'm deciding it!" she cried. "It's time women got together on this thing—and stuck together!"

"But they have! Good heavens, they always have!" he expostulated. "They've decided it with an intolerance and a cruelty that have been proverbial since Hagar in the wilderness!"

"Ah, yes, but that's going to be different!"

Lutie's voice rang young and clear, in that old room, so full of old books, and it brought—that clear trumpet of hope and youth—a sweet pang of pride and pity to his heart, as he watched her.

"They sha'n't be sent to the wilderness—we're going to stick by each other, now!"

"I see."

He measured her carefully with his eye, ready, now, for the coming battle.

"Well, child, there's a lot of room for improvement, we all agree, but let's be quite certain that in changing it all you're going to change it right. For instance, just what is your proposition? That no man has a right to marry a woman while there exists in the world another woman who has what you call a claim upon him?"

Lucia trod warily around this snare and considered.

"If the claim was real, no!" she said boldly, at last.

"Ah! That's the point! And what constitutes such a claim? And who is to be the judge? Evidently, not the man in question, you think?"

"Oh, no!"

"And, quite as evidently, neither of the women, *I* think."

She was silent.

"No, my dear, you must be fair. Allowing only the exception of a wronged and innocent girl (and I will answer for it that no such pathetic creature can have any claim on Max)——"

He paused—she was silent.

"You don't accuse Max Fettauer of that, my dear?"

"No, no!"

"I thought not. Max isn't that kind. Well, allowing for that exception, the woman who can have any claim on Max falls inevitably into one of two classes. She is either one of the unfortunate women who sells her love, in which case she has undoubtedly been paid for it; or she is one of the unwise women who has given it when she was not free to do so, in which case she has invalidated all her claims beforehand. You are thirty years old, Lucia, and I assume that you are perfectly acquainted with the existence of both these classes of women?"

"Of course I am."

"The newspapers are full of one and the novels are full of the other," the doctor went on thoughtfully, "and yet I have never been able to persuade the women who come to me, entangled in the results of both, to explain them to their daughters! And yet they offer them both novels and newspapers every day! I hope, my dear, among your other changes, you will change that?"

She sighed.

"People think girls are fools," she murmured.

"I have often suggested that perhaps they act like fools for that reason, sometimes," said her father.

"Now, I cannot suppose that you are contending that every man who avails himself of the offer to sell what should never be bought, should marry the vendor?"

THE STORM BREAKS

"He shouldn't buy it," said Lucia, coldly.

"You are right. He shouldn't. But he does. And, realizing the essential purpose of civilized marriage, do you prescribe that contract, and all that it implies for civilization, as a cure for each of those soiled and sordid bargains?"

"He shouldn't buy it," she repeated stubbornly.

"You agree with me, you see. And do you know how to teach him not to buy it?"

"How?" she whispered.

"Teach your son," he said quietly.

She shook restlessly from side to side in her chair.

"Oh, *that!*" she flared out, "that old story! That's your remedy for everything!"

"It is the only remedy the world has ever known," he said sternly. "The world is only every woman's children!"

There was a throbbing silence between them: she had never felt so close to him.

"It—it wasn't that kind of woman, father," she said at length, very softly.

"I thought not. Max isn't that kind, either. So where are we? Certainly not at a girl that he is free to marry, or he would have married her long ago. So she is not free, that is, she is married. That is, she was willing to stake her reputation and her happiness, and, incidentally, her husband's reputation and happiness, and certainly Max's reputation and happiness, on a chance that she couldn't even afford to pay for, if she lost! She didn't even love him enough to throw everything to the winds and run away with him! Or perhaps she wanted to—and he refused?"

Lucia shook her head dumbly.

"I thought not. Max isn't *that* kind, either! Lucia,

use your brains. Can you allow such a selfish, timid, backstairs thief to persuade you that she has any claim?"

"She—she didn't try to," Lucia stammered, "you don't understand. It's—it's *me*, father—*I* think she has a claim!"

"You!"

"I think he ought to stick by her," said Lucia huskily, "I—I could never be happy! It's not right and it's disgusting, and I wish I'd never seen him! Oh, father, please let me live with you! Always!"

"My dear little girl! My poor little Lucia!"

She had slipped to his knee, now, and, with her head against his breast, felt herself curiously a child again, sniffing the combined odors of tobacco, lavendered linen, and Russia leather letter-case that memory connected with so many childish contritions.

"Don't you see, father," she began suddenly, "that I can't take anything with a string tied to it! It's like building on a rotten foundation—how can I know?"

"Not so rotten, after all, dear—he might have lied to you."

"I—I almost wish he had!' she flung out.

"Ah, my dear, my dear! 'Where ignorance is bliss,' eh? And you blame us because we've helped you out, that way, so many generations! Don't you see that the truth is more important to Max than the fact he might have concealed?"

"I see that he thought so."

"Not only that: it *is* so."

"Father! Do you mean to tell me it's more important for a man to be truthful than to be—good?"

"There is no doubt of it, Lucia—as you understand 'good.'"

"Then it applies to me just as much!"

THE STORM BREAKS

The doctor reached his arm carefully over her bent head and shook off his long cigar ash.

"Is that what the suffragists are really getting at?" he asked. "Was it the latch-key, all the time?"

"Father!"

"My dear girl," he said dispassionately, "I'm not talking to you as a father—I'm talking to you as a man. That's Max's idea, I believe. He says parents are incapable of it: let's prove that he is wrong! As a matter of fact, I have no earthly control over you: at your age I was supporting my family, and you have refused a very fair professional position in order to keep my house for me and are—or were—very near being married and having, probably, a family of your own. That is to say, you are a grown woman, with every kind of capacity for expressing and supporting yourself. I am talking to you as I would talk to any sensible, mature woman. Now!

"You tell me that there should be one standard of purity and truth for men and women. In your own case, Max has not met yours; you, therefore, claim your right to be judged by his. I suggest that this claim is one of the logical issues of the modern feminist movement (a perfectly tenable proposition) and you immediately become greatly shocked. I cannot see why you should be. There are either two standards to apply, or there is one. If there is one, it is either yours or his. You seem to take it for granted that the one will be yours —I merely suggest that it may not work out that way."

Lutie stared at him, horrified. "Why, but, father! That's what it's all for! That's what we mean!"

"I don't doubt it, my dear, for a moment," he assured her. "That's what you mean—but it doesn't follow that it's what you're going to get!"

"See here, father," said Lucia, sitting firmly in a

chair of her own now and looking squarely in his eyes, "do you mean to tell me that you honestly think men oughtn't to be as good as—as girls?"

"My dear Lucia! How absurd! How could I tell you such a thing?"

"But you said a man had better be honest—than good."

"Ah! That's different, my dear, that's different. And it's just that little difference that you seem incapable, as a sex, of grasping. Now, listen to me, and notice that I say nothing about 'ought' or 'mustn't.' I have no objections, my child, to chaste men or truthful women—quite the contrary, in fact! I say, merely, that, if the average man were not honest, the human race would begin to slide backward, and, if the average woman were not chaste, the sooner it slid the better!"

He paused and shook his finger at her. "All this from the point of view of the race, you know," he said; "the only point of view I am at liberty to recognize. You, of course——"

"Of course, what?" Lutie demanded suspiciously.

"—are an individualist. You are a woman, to begin with; a modern young woman, to go on with; a modern American young woman, to finish with. Nothing, of course, could be more individualistic. As to how all that will work out in the next generation, it remains to be seen."

"Perhaps," Lucia began stiffly, then stopped.

"'Perhaps'?" her father repeated encouragingly.

"Perhaps I'm thinking of the next generation in what I'm doing!"

"Perhaps you are," he answered politely. She colored angrily.

"But you don't believe it?"

"Frankly, I don't, my dear."

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"Not at all. Because I know that you know that, if there were anything in your marriage with Max that was likely to injure the next generation, you would have heard of it, long before now, from me. Because you know that I shouldn't have been so delighted with the whole affair and done all I could to bring it about. No, no, my dear. There are many men who, in justice to the next generation, should never be allowed to marry our daughters; and, if our daughters persistently refused to marry them, the race would bless the day that opened their eyes. But Max is not one of them."

"Then you think that I——"

"I think that you are suffering from a very old malady, my dear, that was bad enough when your sex endured it one by one. Now that you add to its personal pangs the irritation of a collective grievance, it becomes a greater and more dangerous force, but I can't see that it is essentially different."

"You mean——"

"You won't like it, Lucia!"

"Go on, please, father."

"It is called jealousy," said Doctor Stanchon quietly. "You used to say, 'How could you? How could you? *I* don't do it!' Now you say, 'If *I* can't, *you* sha'n't!' For all I know, one may accomplish where the other failed, my dear."

"But you don't think so?"

"I don't say not."

"Oh, no! But if *I* should do what Max has done——"

Lucia stopped abruptly and braced herself for the storm.

"Well, my dear?"

Her father's voice was calmly speculative, and she went on.

"If I should do what he did, wouldn't that affect the next generation either?"

"More so, I imagine, than any other one thing that could happen to it, Lucia!"

"Oh, how unjust you are! How sickeningly unfair!"

"Unfair?" he repeated, in obvious surprise, "I, unfair? What have I to do with it? Did I plan this little interlude of human life on this particular ball of earth? Anything you don't like, you call unfair. Don't you understand that since the first sea-beasts fought in the primeval slime, one great contest has been going on eternally, one great problem has been solving itself, by rule of thumb, through blood and torture and oppression and frightful mistakes that have sent whole races to the scrap heap? The 'efficiency' slogan is as old as the hills, dear girl, and Nature will 'scrap' a sex as relentlessly as you will an interlocking filing-cabinet, in your prison-reform offices, if she needs to at any given point. And I admit that she often has—to a certain extent and for a certain time. For what is she after?"

Lucia's eyes never left his face. She saw suddenly why the learned bodies he addressed listened to him so willingly.

"She is trying to make the best and most enduringly flexible type of human being," he went on, enveloping her in the magnetism of his low, warm voice—the voice she had inherited, "and after every possible sort of experiment, she has found that she most nearly accomplishes it when she mates a brave and honest man with a chaste and kindly woman. That is her lowest common denominator: that she *must have,* in the vast majority of cases, in order to make the human type a success.

And the reason is obvious. If a man is not brave, he can't win out personally; if he is not honest, he can't advance collectively. If a woman is not kind, he doesn't want her; if she is not chaste, he can't keep her.

"Upon this basis you may build as many virtues as you wish—or can. But experience shows that this is the basis. And men have always known this. So that a brave man and an honest man has often been a profligate—but David is nevertheless a hero. And a kind woman and a chaste woman has often been a stupid woman—we do not know that the Madonna wasn't! But humanity has always known what 'manly' meant, and what 'womanly' should be, and no generation will ever bully us into believing that one must be chaste and the other logical."

"But, father, *mightn't* they be? *Couldn't* they be?"

Lucia's hands clenched in her lap; her lip quivered. Was this tide of all the ages what she had swept at so contentedly with her neat little broom? Did things move as slowly as this, in spite of all her committees?

"Oh, that's different! That's different!" he cried, and comforted her with his rare, warm smile.

"Work at that all you like, my dear! That's just civilization. Look at the children of chaste men and clever women, and see if more of 'em aren't worth working for! But"—he gave her a whimsical glance—"the kind of people that are working the hardest, just now, seem to forget the necessity of starting true to type."

He chuckled thoughtfully. She leaned forward, eager to catch his lowest word; never had she felt so interested, so fascinated by his frank and friendly talk, as with an utter equal.

"It's like those grab-bags your Aunt Judy was always arranging for the hospital fairs," he said. "Nature

starts the little boys and girls at the great mysterious bag and gives them years of 'chances.' Only, to get into the bag at all, Aunt Judy's little clients had to have some five-cent pieces; and, to stand any chance in Nature's big game, they must start with something in their fists, too. So the Old Lady says:

" 'Here, little boy, here are courage and honesty; take them, and grab what else you can. Here, little girl, here are kindness and chastity; give one away and hold the other tight, and as much else as you can manage you're welcome to!'

"But, of course, accidents happen. The bag is full of accidents. It almost seems as though we could have packed it better ourselves——"

He looked meaningly at Lucia, who blushed, and resented it, and loved him, all at once.

"It was hard to give the little boy high spirits enough to make him brave, and not give him too much. He was daring, and therefore curious. So he has always made a great deal of trouble. And it was even harder to make the little girl chaste without making her cold, and to keep her kind without letting her get easygoing, on the one hand, or scheming and slavish, on the other. And, for whichever of these mistakes she made, the little boy has always blamed her severely. He has had the easiest job, for it is much easier to be brave than to be kind; so he has always grabbed more out of the bag and had more room to carry it—her arms have been so full of babies, for one thing.

"But, with everything that he has pulled out for himself, he has pulled out something for her, too; and of late years, all the mechanical toys he happened on seem to have been adapted to her uses, so that she has set them all working for her and gained so much time and

strength that now all she needs is for him to invent an incubator for her babies, she thinks, to make her as free to grab as ever he was! And maybe he will . . . maybe he will . . .

"But, whatever he invents, he knows he must be brave, or she will not love him, and, whatever she grabs, he knows she must be chaste, or he cannot love her. Believe me, dear, this is true, and it was true when 1913 was B. C."

"But education," she whispered, half to herself.

"If education advances till 19,130 it will still be true, dear," he said.

She fled across the space between them and buried herself in his arms.

"Oh, why can't they all be like you?" she cried, between tears and laughter. "I always said I'd marry you, when I was little—you're the only one that understands!"

"You're wrong, dear," he said quietly, "Max will understand."

"But he doesn't! He says it's absurd. He says he wishes he'd never told me!"

"You must give him time, then. And, from his point of view, it *is* absurd, you know. This generation goes on too fast for itself, even. Why, see here, Lucia, your grandmother wouldn't have allowed the mention of this other woman in her presence; your mother would have been merciless to her, and thought herself more than justified; you insist upon handing Max over to her! What is he to do? What is he to think?"

"If he prefers that sort of woman——"

"Come, come, Lucia, be reasonable! How can he prefer her if he gives her up for you? Has he been with her since he knew you?"

"Of course not," she said coldly.

"And that is nearly a year. Can't you see he is free?"

"How about her?" she murmured against his shoulder, "perhaps she isn't 'free,' as you call it. Has she no rights?"

"Not one, dear, not a shadow of one," he said gravely. "Whatever bargain she may have made, be sure she knew —and knows—that that was the principal clause in it. She has no rights."

"It wasn't a bargain," she murmured, her face hidden, "she wasn't—she was—Oh, father, she wasn't *that* sort of woman! They just—it was just as if—Oh, you'd never understand!"

CHAPTER VI

The Mortgage

THERE was a long pause.

He sighed and lifted her off his knees, at length, and rose silently.

"How strong he is!" she thought.

He walked slowly to his great desk that held the overflow of its mate in the downstairs office, and unlocked, with a key on his ring, one of the inner drawers. From this he took a black, japanned dispatch box and unlocked it with another smaller key. He fumbled about in the box a moment and came back with a paper in his hand. As he unfolded it from its stiffened creases she saw that it held a small, old-fashioned photograph, mounted on a foreign-looking satiny cardboard. He handed it to her in silence: it was the picture of a beautiful woman, with smooth hair worn in what used to be called the "French twist," and the small waist and looped draperies of the early eighties. The eyes smiled at Lucia under graceful arched brows, but the mouth was a passion of sadness. It was the face of a woman not much older than the girl who looked at it, but Lucia would not feel as old for ten years to come.

"Who is it, father?" she asked, and glanced from the picture to him. He was quite pale, and seemed twice about to speak, but no words came.

"Did you—were you in love with her once?" she asked gently, touched by his moved white face.

"Very much so," he said, quite firmly now. "She had the same claim upon my life that you resent in Max's."

A flood of red poured over her; it seemed that she was burning.

"Oh!" she cried and choked on something in her throat, "Oh! *Father!*"

"Yes," he said quietly, "that is just what I mean. I want you to see. I don't know any other way."

She stared, unseeing, at the picture. "You, too! *You, too!*" she whispered.

"I, too," he said. "Is it so hard, Lucia? It was all before you were born, you know. Shall I tell you about it?"

"I—I suppose so," she agreed listlessly. It seemed she must be dreaming.

"I was very young," he said, standing before her as she drooped in his chair that had so lately held them both, "and she was very beautiful and very unhappy. Her husband was a brutal, cold-blooded fellow who neglected her utterly and had lost all pretense of interest in her or her children long before I ever met her. I was shy and lonely and proud, and I had never been in love in my life—really. We were the only English-speaking people in the *pension.* Do you see?"

"Oh, yes, I see," she answered, and hated her voice for sounding so cold, but could not meet his eyes.

"Of course, I should have taken her away," he went on simply, "but she would not give up the children. And he would never have divorced her, she always insisted, and she absolutely refused to ruin my career. And, of course, it would have ruined it."

"Is this my father? How can he tell me these things?" she thought.

"She was nine years older than I," he went on steadily, "and I thought I could never care for a mere girl after that. But she knew better. And when I met your mother, she knew from my letters. I was going back to tell her, but she wrote me—this."

He handed the creased letter to Lucia, and she took it awkwardly, still not meeting his eyes. It was not very long, but she was slow at reading it.

DEAREST DICK:

I know from the way you write that your only reason for crossing the ocean again is to tell me something. Do not bother to come, dear Dick, for I know it already! What I have waited for every day of my life since we began has happened, and, now that I'm certain, I feel a strange sort of relief —I suppose you won't understand. I hope you'll be very happy, my dear, and that she is as good and lovely as you deserve. Is it the girl who had the runaway horse and you saved her? I am sure it is.

I hope I haven't been bad for you, dear, or hurt you—how I have cried over it all! God knows I've paid for my happiness. You'll never know how I've worked and planned and lied right and left to protect you from your own chivalrous folly! I believe I shall never tell another lie—how I hated them! When your letter first betrayed you, I wished I had never met you, and felt dreadfully bitter, but that's all over now. I've had many, many feelings in our two years that you never knew, dear, dear Dick, but I knew I had no right to have them and I kept them from you.

I wish I could see her picture. Could you tell me when you have children? You were so gentle and thoughtful when little Elsie was ill! I'll never forget it. And don't bother about me—it will only be what it was before you came. And I shall feel better about the children. It would be worse to have

you just grow tired of me, you know. Don't ever think that again, "that you ought to despise yourself," dear. When a woman does what I did she knows the price she must pay. I did, and I will pay. *C'est tout.* And I shall always remember you lovingly. But don't come—don't come! I have had three months alone already, and I'd rather go on from there. Be happy, dearest, dearest Dick, and don't quite forget YOUR ELSIE.

Lucia folded back the letter and her heart ached at it, but her face was cold and stiff.

"Did my—did you ever tell——"

"Your mother? No, never. She couldn't have borne it."

"Is—is she dead?"

"Oh, yes, ten years ago."

"Did you——"

"I saw her, yes, but she was unconscious."

"How dreadful!"

He smiled sadly.

"It wasn't dreadful, really, Lucia. I came just to see if there was anything I could do. We were not lovers, then, you know."

"Oh!"

Her voice was edged, but he was patient under it.

"Her husband had grown much kinder—his health was completely broken—and he felt her death much more than I did. You see, she was his wife. But he had his children."

She stared at him, confused and resentful.

"What was really 'dreadful,' if you like, was the time, shortly after I married, when she was sick and lost her grip on herself and sent for me. I couldn't go because your mother wasn't well, and I had to refuse her. It

was very hard, for your mother wasn't seriously ill, and for any legitimate excuse I could have gone, but I couldn't explain this, and I wouldn't lie. If it had been an old family friend, even. . . . But it was impossible. I had no feeling for her but friendliness and gratitude and pity—but it was impossible. God—how I suffered!"

His face twitched and he sat abruptly in Lutie's chair, opposite her.

"I can't describe how it cut me," he said, painfully, "it seemed so—so *low* to refuse her! But that's part of the price."

"But what did *she* pay!" Lucia cried passionately, "think of that!"

"I have thought of it, child," he said, and a silence fell between them.

"You think it's all one-sided, don't you?" he went on after a little. "It's not so, Lucia. But each pays his own price, in his own way. Mine . . . oh, it seems absurd, now, but how I suffered under it! Do you know, would you believe, that, from the moment I knew you were to be born till you were, oh, fully a year old, I lived in perfect terror lest you should look like *her!* I used to dream of it at night. It was purely an *idée fixe,* of course, but it haunted me and spoiled all my pride in your coming. I couldn't reason myself out of it. And your poor mother never believed that I really liked you till just before she died."

He sat quiet, and insensibly her heart began to soften, her nerves grew quieter. He seemed her father again.

"There was one other thing—after your mother died," he went on. "You were only two years old, you know. We had been very happy together. And the moment after the funeral, when I sat alone, trying to remember

your mother's face as I had seen it last, well and smiling—all I could see was *hers!*"

He shook his head.

"It was the merest trick of the imagination, of course—I almost never thought of *her,* then—but it possessed me and I could never, actually, recall your mother's face—not even in her coffin. I have learned, since, that it's fairly common. Many men have told me of their inability to picture their wives mentally, but I didn't know that then, and I had a bad year because of it. It turned me bitterly against *her,* too, and I never answered the kind letter she wrote me—poor Elsie!"

Lucia shivered at the name, but he had ceased to look at her.

"I thought it was a judgment on me," he said musingly, and then: "It was all so long ago!"

He had forgotten her entirely. . . .

"Oh, child!" he burst out suddenly, "don't try to play Providence! Who are you to punish and decide? Do you think Life doesn't attend to that? When we hand you over those valuable pieces of property, ourselves, do you suppose we don't know if they're mortgaged? Do you suppose we don't regret? But we hope we can lift that mortgage in time and start our sons unencumbered. Don't you see? Our sons! I'm not the first man a mortgage has steadied, Lucia! *Is that an example, then?* No, no, a hundred times, no! But it's a solace, my girl, it's a solace."

He went over to her and leaned over her chair.

"You can burn the letter now, and the photograph, if you like," he said, taking her hand that clenched so tightly on them. "I suppose this is why I didn't do it before. But there's no more reason, now——"

Her fingers tightened silently.

"No? I suppose I shouldn't have shown them to you? The impulse took me, and you know what everybody always says about those impulses of mine—I don't dare not follow them," he pleaded.

"But if it's made you hate me, Lutie——"

How boyish he looked! He was like Max, there. Were all men the same?

She gasped, laughed unsteadily, then great sobs shook her, and she was in his arms.

"Hate you? I never loved you before!"

She clung desperately to him, but her storm of weeping did not alarm him.

"It's all right, now!" he whispered and stroked her hair.

"I—I'll marry anyone you say, but I'll never leave you!" she murmured at last. "I—I never *had* you, really, before, did I?"

He held her tighter.

"Was it because I told you?"

She nodded soberly.

"I suppose so. And yet—I don't see why. A—a mortgage is a mortgage!"

He kissed her wet eyes more tenderly than any lover.

"And I must lose her!" he thought, half resentful, half proud.

"Darling girl," he said low in her ear (was she more woman or child to him?) "never mind us—what do *we* matter? Take us, you and Nature, mortgaged as we are, and build us into those great, living properties of yours—the new generations! It's *you* that count. . . ."

She nestled closer in his arms and sighed.

"We count too much to risk the mortgage, I suppose!"

He held her off at arms' length and looked hard into the very core of her honest eyes.

"So much that we don't call it a mortgage, daughter," he said. "Do you know what Nature has taught us to call it?"

She caught her breath.

"What?" she whispered, terrified suddenly at his cold, appraising eyes.

"It is one of the few things that history, religion, and science have agreed upon," he said slowly, "and the sons of Adam have learned it once and forever. We call it a *flaw in the title,* Lucia, and we look elsewhere when we are ready to build—we look elsewhere!"

And in their meeting eyes the past and future met.

CHAPTER VII

Where Charity Began

OF all Lucia's friends there were none so dear to her father as the Peter Forsythes. Peter he had known since chicken-pox days, and he had been the first confidant of the engagement that had made Peter the most consistently lucky young man above ground in the estimation of his friends. A big, jolly giant, with the temper of a well-bred St. Bernard; handsome and rich enough to have made Mattie Forsythe the justifiable envy of her young married friends; the possessor of a rollicking bass laugh that would have cheered by itself the countless poor devils who knew from experience how much more than that laugh they got from Peter—he was a hard man to deny a favor.

And as for Mattie—if it had not been for Betty Girard, who, with Marie Fitch and Celestine Varnham, formed Lucia's inner circle of close friends—Betty, who drew men's hearts as honey draws bees, why, Peter's wife would have stood first with Lucia's father.

"I'm sorry about Dick," said the doctor slowly, "very sorry, Peter, but, honestly, I don't see what I can do! There *is* an etiquette, you know——"

"Oh, damn your etiquette, Stanchon," Peter interrupted quietly, "you're not going to see Dick Varnham go to the bad and never turn your hand?"

The doctor twisted a thick, black cigar and appeared to study the label curiously.

"But I *have* turned my hand, Peter; I have! I told you last year these recurrent cases are the very devil! It's not one of your simple Muldoon propositions: there's no lack of will power there. Varnham has one of those queer mental twists . . . it's one of the cases that lie outside of my bailiwick, Peter."

"I don't believe there *ain't* no sich cases!" Peter burst out obstinately, and the rare, sweet Stanchon smile (men caught it oftener than women, somehow) rewarded him warmly.

"Well, well, you always were an obstinate cuss, Peter! I'll go 'round with you. But I warn you, now, it won't accomplish much at this stage of the game. It's too late."

He straightened himself abruptly.

"Do you know what Varnham needs more than anything in my opinion? He needs the right woman. I never saw but two cases just like his, and, in each of them, a woman pulled 'em out. But I'm afraid there's not much chance here?"

Peter's jaw shot out.

"You know Celestine," he said shortly.

"I never understood Mrs. Varnham," the doctor remarked temperately.

"Nor anybody else, either, that had sense!" growled Peter.

In the vast apartment hotel the upholstered mahogany lift carried them gently, with the utter absence of friction that characterized the whole great building, to the Circassian walnut door of the Varnhams' winter quarters. Dick's confidential butler-valet received them graciously, flooded the conventional Sheraton dining-room with electric light, murmured that Mrs. Varnham had a committee meeting in the drawing room and a news-

paper gentleman in the library, and was off to fetch his master.

"Mr. Varnham takes a little nap about now, sir," he added quietly.

"A nap at five in the afternoon?" Stanchon queried, and Peter shrugged his shoulders.

They waited in silence, being men given to silence, one professionally, the other by nature.

A quick rustling came down the hall, and the unmistakable odor of Celestine Varnham's heady Russian scent blew past them.

"You get the idea, of course?"

Her brisk staccato, so curiously at variance with the languorous perfume, struck them both.

"I'd like you to emphasize the fact that, although the Ohio system is, of course, the model, our organization has already made several improvements—especially in the case of the alcoholic and drug fiends. If we can make five thousand over expenses we can start with the Home at once. It's wonderful how everyone responds —I collected four hundred dollars last week personally. Nordica is going to sing for us, remember. And Mr. Gibson will draw a picture on the stage—feature that, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly, Mrs. Varnham, we'll feature that, all right. The picture is to be raffled, you say?"

"Yes—we haven't decided who will raffle it yet. I wanted Archbishop—what *is* his name, that just saw the Pope—you know (so many of our men are Catholics)—but his secretary said it wouldn't be possible. It was most annoying—he could have worn his sash and his ring, and all that, and done us a lot of good, for he approves thoroughly—he wrote us a beautiful letter. Would you like the letter?"

An inaudible murmur from the respectful newspaper gentleman.

"And please make it clear that this is *not* a charity; the point is that it's self-supporting. The men pay for their own baths and gymnasium fees and all that, and the prominent doctors (did I give you that list of doctors and the photographs?) give their services. Later, we're going in for the campaign for public baths and the mayor is going to make a speech in Carnegie Hall. But that *Sun* reporter last week treated the whole meeting in an entirely wrong spirit, and kept calling it a charity and spoke of us as patronesses! Nothing could be more ridiculous—we're a committee: the ways and means committee of the Women's Auxiliary of the Associated. . . ."

"Oh, yes, certainly, Mrs. Varnham. I understand. And may we have a picture of Miss Lucia Stanchon and her prize Pekinese—the one Mr. Collier is going to auction off?"

An infuriated growl from Doctor Stanchon sent Peter into a spasm of silent laughter.

"Shut up!" he whispered, choking, "you're on that prominent doctors' list, old man! This is as good as a play—and you can't stop Lutie; she's thirty!"

The doctor subsided, fuming. Celestine's high, distinct voice babbled on.

"—and the president's letter, too. That's going to be made into a booklet. But the Pekinese auction is for the spring. Sothern and Marlowe have almost promised to be the honorary presidents for the stage section; I'll see that you get an interview. But the main point now is the tremendous growth of the movement and the fact that the public *must* support us with more money. Of course, we have four thousand mem-

bers already, but the membership fee is only a dollar. . . ."

A door at the side of the room opened and Dick Varnham hurried in.

"Hello! What's up?" he began, consciously. "We've got a dinner on and that confounded opera—I was trying to get a bite of sleep so as not to snore in the box. What's doing, Peter?"

"I—I got the idea you'd be alone, Dick."

Peter gazed awkwardly around the uncordial dining-room.

"Oh!" Dick grinned uncomfortably. "Well, I usually am. The madam's mostly busy at the Fifth Avenue joint—queer place to manage convicts from—what? But they're all up here to-day. I don't know why. Something about addressing circulars, I b'lieve. We're dining with you, Stanchon—know about it? Lutie's got His Nibs' box. What's the show, Tina?"

Celestine, in the doorway, smiled absent-mindedly.

"Why, hello, Peter! So nice to see you, Dr. Stanchon. 'Tannhäuser,' I'm sorry to say, but——"

"Then that settles it!"

Dick's voice was thick and his eyes met no one's, but he brought his hand down heavily on the shining sideboard where the decanters clinked and jingled at the blow.

"I swear to God I won't hear 'Tannhäuser' again this season! Or else you'll have to move a cot into the box."

The undoubted finality of his tones struck them forcibly, and they looked at him in silence, half helpless, half amused.

"If I have to watch that fat ass chewing cough-drops on that painted stool before he whangs away for an

hour and a half on that gilt cardboard harp, I shall just get up and scream!" he went on gloomily.

Still they stood silent; the doctor watched him narrowly.

"And that woman with the piano legs!" he stormed on, "I'll throw something at *her* yet, you mark my words! I always knew there was something the matter with the Germans, and, if they can swallow that, that proves it. I don't mind Caruso and the donkey—but 'Tannhäuser'!"

Peter chuckled comfortably.

"As a musical critic, Dicky, you'd have made your fortune," he said cheerfully, "but as a poor, hard-working stock broker——"

"We promised Lutie," Celestine began, icily, "and I hardly see——"

"Just a moment," said Dick. His voice had an ugly timbre.

"*You* promised Lutie, Tina; I don't know that I did."

"I don't know that you've ever been in the habit of making our social engagements," she returned, an exaggerated detachment in her cool tones.

"No, nor any other kind of engagements, either," he muttered, weakening under her polite scorn, "the engagements in this family are all made by the other half of the sketch, eh, doctor?"

"That's mostly the way now-a-days, Dick," Stanchon agreed imperturbably, "but I think we can arrange this one. I'm not so keen for 'Tannhäuser' myself."

"Oh, Doctor Stanchon!" Celestine flashed her hard, bright eyes at him accusingly, "and that new woman's so wonderful, they say!"

"Nonsense, Gadski's the only one that can get away with it," said Peter definitely, "I don't seem to thirst for

'Tannhäuser' myself, Tina; people have been awfully generous with him this season!"

Celestine's lips narrowed.

"It's going to be a little difficult at this late hour to arrange," she began smoothly (*"I'd much rather she flew out at us!"* Peter thought uncomfortably), but Stanchon's quiet authority held them all.

"If you'll allow me to suggest a plan, Mrs. Varnham, I'm sure it will work. Who else is coming?"

"The Walter Girards," she answered sharply.

"Then all you want is two men. Lutie would always rather have young Van Wynken than her old dad, and Max is off duty to-night—I could pluck him from the Eye-and-Ear for you and send him over. How would that do?"

"Oh, well, if you're determined," she agreed, mollified instantly, "but Lutie won't have room, perhaps. . . ."

"We'll dine here," said Peter briskly, "I'm sure Williams can scare us up a chop and some ale or something."

"Certainly, sir," murmured Williams, gliding by appreciatively, "at seven-thirty, sir?"

"Then that's settled," Dick ended, heavily, "and for heaven's sake, Tina, sweep those women out, can't you? I don't see why you don't meet up in the country, anyhow. The drawing room's bigger—and you'd be a darn sight nearer Sing Sing, for that matter!"

Celestine laughed frankly.

"He *is* funny sometimes, isn't he?" she asked, and her bright, boyish smile gleamed out—her most charming feature.

"I tell you what, Dicky, you get His Nibs to give us his private car—it would be a great advertisement, that—

and we'll take you up on the proposition and do a lot of work, going and coming."

She turned her slim, straight back on them and went quickly out.

"It *is* pretty hard to shut you up here," she added, over her shoulder, "but I don't often do it, you must admit, Dick, do I? Honestly, I thought you were at the club. But we'll all clear out now. We had five hundred circulars to sign, personally. *Au 'voir!*"

"And now, Dicky," said Peter, turning the key in the door, "—No thanks, no Scotch—let's talk."

It was twelve o'clock when the two of them went swiftly down in the mahogany lift. Dicky sat where they had left him, in the smoke-blue room, drawn and sullen, but unconvinced.

"You see," said the doctor wearily, "it's no use. The country's the place for him, but he won't go there alone. Indeed, I wouldn't want him to. And Mrs.—ah, here they are!"

Celestine, dropping her fruit-tinted opera cloak off one gleaming shoulder, came into the rich, quiet lobby, the handsome young surgeon at her heels.

"Just going?" she said brightly, "did Williams find you any food? Good night, Dr. Fettauer—no really, I'm as good as in my own hall, I assure you; don't come up. Heavens, I'm tired!"

"But you can sleep late to-morrow," Peter suggested perfunctorily, wondering why Celestine didn't look handsomer in evening dress. As a matter of fact, like many American women, she was at her best in the afternoon, when drooping plumes and deep furs softened the severity of her profile, and trim, tailor-drawn lines revealed her slim flanks and flat back. Her shoulders, though

smooth and white, were unalluring, somehow, and her eyes seemed hard and restless, her quick smile more of the head than the heart.

"Oh, can I?" she cried, laughing. "And that's about as much as you know, Peterkin! You're terribly *vieux jeu*. I must be at the League Rooms at nine, sharp, and do a lot of telephoning before, besides having my hair waved! I'm going to Ellis Island at eleven and lunch with the Commissioner at one. And at three we're going to meet the Bedford Reformatory people and give them a little idea of what we're doing. Dr. Fettauer's going to help us a lot—I've converted him—between the acts! At five—now, what *am* I doing at five? Oh, I know; I've got to pour tea for my mother-in-law. *That* nearly *kills* me."

"Too bad, Tina," said Peter consolingly, "and she's never even been sent up for thirty days! She hardly qualifies, does she? Never mind; cheer up, there'll be *some* criminals there, maybe!"

"You're awfully witty, Peter," she murmured, yawning. "Night-night!"

She slipped into the waiting lift and rose lightly above them, a brilliant figure framed in the door.

"Looks like one of those Sargent portraits," said Peter thoughtfully.

The Austrian's eyes flashed appreciatively.

"Precisely!" he cried, "and how he understands American women! But what amazing vitality—what fresh interests! Last year she was wanting the franchise! And to-night she told me that she has decided it is more important to be worthy of it when it comes! Wonderful, wonderful! They are made of steel, I believe."

"The question is whether that's the best material for the sex," Stanchon rumbled thoughtfully. "Can I give

you a lift anywhere, doctor? My love to Mattie, Peter."

"You don't appear to share my admiration for the gifted little lady up there," said the Austrian, curiously. "No, thanks, I'm operating early to-morrow and I won't smoke."

The motor leaped over a series of the crevasses which adorn the boulevards of our metropolis and the older man's short answer was jolted into indistinguishable grunts.

"Really, you know, I think you're just a little hard on her. Of course, if she had children, or were a poor man's wife——"

"She has children, two of them," Stanchon interrupted coldly, "and if her husband keeps on the way he's going, she's quite as likely to find herself a poor man's wife as any other stock broker's who deals in margins."

"A-a-ah!"

Fettauer arched his mobile eyebrows. "The children——"

"Are in the country. At least the girl is. Boy's at Groton. The girl is quite a capable groom, they tell me, and a very good judge of horseflesh. Her mother told me once she believed in the English method of bringing up children—whatever that may be."

"How extraordinarily funny!"

"Yes, I suppose that's how Sargent feels, when he paints 'em."

"And yet she doesn't *seem* a hypocrite," the younger man began musingly.

"'Seem!' She *isn't* a hypocrite!" cried Stanchon irritably, "that's the worst of it! None of these women are hypocrites. They're idiotically in earnest; they're hopeless, Fettauer, hopeless! The cleverest and strong-

est of them (superficially) are all bitten and rotted through with this mania for publicity, and Big Results, as they call it. Why, my own daughter . . ."

He gulped down his wrath.

"After all, it's only a phase, perhaps," he went on more quietly, "and I suppose it wastes no more vitality than they used to put into bridge parties. Of course, I see the seamy side of all of these new fashions; all the wrecks drift into our ports, you know. And the idea was good, to begin with."

"It's difficult to see just what Lucia, for instance, *would* be doing," Fettauer persisted placidly. "She hasn't two children nor a stock-broker husband. And you'd have hard work to find a better *haus-frau*, now, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, yes, that's fair enough. Lutie's a good manager. Of course, we had the same servants since she was a school girl, till lately . . . but Lutie 'plays the game,' as she'd put it."

"Then, what do you want her to do? Crochet antimacassars—like Victorian heroines?'

"No, no," admitted the elder, wearily, "the children must lead their own lives. And the generations change —mine did, I know. As for the antimacassars (here's the hospital, isn't it? Good night!) as for them, Lucia wouldn't make them, anyway—wage-earning women need the money, she tells me!"

CHAPTER VIII

Dr. Stanchon Operates

THEY parted with a friendly laugh, and no less friendly was the great specialist's smile for Celestine, when, exact to the minute of her appointment the next day, she sat opposite him, slender and lightly poised forward in the big leather chair. Nor was the friendliness assumed, for though to the careless glance she was as brisk as ever, his practiced eye caught instantly the controlled strain of the mouth; the tired eyes, the least bit swollen; the low, purposely evened voice.

"I've come, as I suppose you expected, to ask about Dick, doctor," she said quietly. "He—he was not quite himself last night. It seems this has been going on for some time. I think I might have been told."

"'Been told? *Been told,*' my child," he repeated gravely, "do you mean to say you didn't know?"

"Not that it was so bad as this," she said simply. "I knew Dick drank, of course, like everybody else. Personally, I have always thought he drank too much, but, as I never drink anything myself, I'm not a very good judge, I suppose."

He fought silently against the distaste for this clear-headed, direct woman—one of those mysterious repulsions that Nature sets between flesh and flesh.

"Aren't you a little hard on Dick, Mrs. Varnham?" he began, but she took him up quickly.

"Hard?" she queried, "hard? I think not, Doctor Stanchon. I try to be fair. Dick's interests and mine are not the same, you know, and I have never interfered."

"Apparently not," he said dryly, but she did not resent the sarcasm.

"You don't approve of that. Would you mind saying why? We have our own work, each of us, and surely you don't think seriously that sensible grown persons can lay down rules for each other? There has to be some system of give-and-take to make life possible to-day."

"To-day or any other day of the world," he answered shortly, "the only trouble I find with the system of you and your friends, Mrs. Varnham, is that there is too much take and too little give in it!"

This whipped the red into her cool cheeks. "Doctor Stanchon! Do you mean to imply—" He pressed his advantage implacably.

"I am not in the habit of 'implying,' Mrs. Varnham, especially in this room," he said with emphasis, "and a woman of your intelligence will comprehend readily why. You consult me, of your own initiative, on a matter which has no connection with pills and powders, as you must know, or you would not come to a man who so rarely has recourse to them. Your husband's case is practically psychological. You appreciate this, obviously, for our conversation has dealt, up to now, with the social and domestic situation which, in my opinion, has produced his present condition. It is of this situation that I must speak, if I am to help you at all."

"But you need not speak of it as if you thought that I took Dick's money and gave him no return for it," she said sharply, "for I suppose that is what you mean."

"I wasn't thinking of money, entirely," he said, more gently, now that she breathed harder, "though I admit that, like a true member of the practical sex, you jump to the essential point, but of things in general. What return *do* you give?"

Celestine pursed her lips a little and met his eyes squarely.

"I'm afraid you can't convince me with quite such a *banal* line of argument, Doctor Stanchon," she said. "As a matter of fact, I neither bake the bread nor warm Dick's slippers nor make my own clothes. There are a great many reasons for this, among which I may mention that Dick prefers French water-rolls from the baker's, never wears slippers, and insists upon Paquin."

For the first time Stanchon smiled. *"Very well played, little Celestine!"* he thought, and added: "You're a clever woman, my dear Mrs. Varnham, and you must try to believe that I appreciate it. Of course, I don't mean that sort of thing. No, no. But tell me, what return *do* you give? Don't tell me what you *don't* do."

Celestine drew a long breath, and two little discs of red settled below her cheekbones.

"Why, since you insist upon it, I suppose I give what most women of my class and my means and my interests give, Doctor Stanchon—I live with my husband!"

He looked over her head.

"Do you?" he asked thoughtfully. "When?"

Celestine swallowed hard.

"Where?" he asked again.

She bit her lip.

"How?" he asked for the third time.

Celestine rose abruptly.

"You are making me very angry, Doctor Stanchon," she said, in a dangerous, low voice, "and if that is what

"'You are making me very angry, Dr. Stanchon,' she said in a dangerous, low voice."

you set out to do, you have succeeded. But that is the only result, and, as anger always gives me indigestion and as I have at present too many responsibilities to be able to lose my health, I think we will consider this interview closed."

"Sit down, my dear," he said gently. Her mind was actually through the door, but something clogged her muscles, and she stood wavering, staring at him, though his eyes were still fixed above her head.

"Sit down, Celestine," he said again, and it was as if arms pushed her back into the chair.

"Now, listen to me," he began, "and, when I am wrong, correct me immediately. As a scientist, I know of but one reason for marriage; as a student of history, I am compelled to believe in monogamy; but, as a resident of twentieth century New York, I recognize many reasons for forming an alliance, starting an establishment, entering a partnership, or anything you choose to call it. Only, it seems to me, there must be some sort of system, in any case, a working basis—rules for the game, in short. Now, all I ask is: What's your system? Where is your basis? Who agreed on the rules?"

She looked into her lap silently.

"Don't think I'm 'all up in the air,' as Peter puts it, over this," he went on after a pause. "I'm perfectly prepared to illustrate my case, and I'll begin with your mother's family, which, though you may forget it, I once knew very well. At eighteen, Mrs. Varnham, your mother, the most beautiful débutante of her season, I am told (I was in college then) drew the first prize in the New York matrimonial lottery. To that bargain she brought beauty and charm; for these commodities her husband paid with a high social position and enormous wealth. Up to the day of the divorce, both of them, so

far as I know, lived up to their contract; your mother never lacked a luxury, your father never found a sulky or a disobedient wife.

"Whatever the Bishop may have said to them when he married them, your father knew perfectly that he was buying an ambitious girl who was in love (as much as such a girl could be) with her cousin—whom he knew well, by the way; she knew that her husband was a fast, self-indulgent fellow, and very little likely to change his ways. And yet they got on, somehow, for nineteen years. When you were sixteen, on the advice of many friends, of whom I was one, your mother obtained her divorce. By the time you were brought to this country, your father was dead. I suppose you don't remember him at all?"

She shook her head.

"No. Well, I have always maintained that your mother lived up to her contract.

"Now, take your friend Mrs. Girard—Betty. You know, of course, though people in general don't, I imagine, that a very fair proportion of the family's expenses are met by her. The income of a successful portrait painter nowadays is a very respectable affair, and I doubt very much if Girard could keep up an automobile and an annual European trip and such a country place as they have, singlehanded. On the other hand, as she says very frankly, if she should lose her vogue to-day, they could have every comfort and many luxuries, only—the apartment in town would be given up and Girard would undoubtedly cut down his clubs, and those regular opera seats, and that sort of thing. He's a lucky man, Girard, and, you may depend upon it, he knows it. Otherwise, would he be willing to spend so many evenings alone, do you think?"

"But Walter Girard hates society," Celestine interrupted defensively; "he would sit studying away with those old prints and kakemono things of his every night and riding about the country all day Sunday as long as he lived—that's his idea of pleasure!"

"Exactly. And, as he is devotedly fond of his brilliant wife, and as it was their love of art that brought them together, he would undoubtedly prefer to have her with him, I suppose. And, while the children were very young, and she worked at home, she was. Now that the boy's at school and the girl's time is scheduled out as children's time is nowadays, and she works so much more in her studio and has so much more business in the city, the results of her financial independence begin to show. Mind you, no one can say that Mrs. Girard *neglects* her husband. A certain amount of her time is his, a certain amount the children's, a certain amount absolutely her own. I take off my hat to the most systematic woman of my acquaintance. She has a keen sense of honor and Girard can trust her perfectly not to abuse her independence—but she had it long before she married him, you know, and I should be sorry for him if he questioned it!"

Celestine grinned appreciatively.

"Walter's never paid a personal bill of hers since they were married," she added enviously.

"Exactly. And I have a shrewd suspicion that he's never seen many of his little daughter's, either. She has her ideas, Madam Betty! Now, I don't know Girard very well, though I've taken care of her ever since they came to New York, but I imagine that, if his very able wife had been more of a *Joan*, he would have been very glad to be her *Darby!*"

She nodded.

"Well, there you are. He is a wise man and doesn't press his point. He realizes that it was her work that first attracted him (you know he asked to meet her after he saw those clever cartoons at the National Arts) and he couldn't very well object to her growing success. She is perfectly just, from her point of view, and the result is that I have never seen a talent and a temperament like hers driven four-in-hand with the maternal instinct and a domestic establishment before. As a matter of fact, she's unique in my experience. But . . . she has a system. She makes a bargain, which I, as a professional man, understand myself."

"She has a husband she can rely on," said Celestine stiffly.

"Perhaps she knew that when she selected him," he shot back instantly.

"Now, my dear child," he went on, "let us take only one more. As you see, I don't need to blab any secrets —take your own intimate friend, Mattie Forsythe. I'm tremendously fond of Martha, as you know, and I felt very much concerned when she got headed in the wrong direction. I knew Peter would never stand it. You see Peter's as domestic as Girard and as spoiled as your father was. Oh—he's as straight as a string, of course! But I mean that he's an only son and life's been pretty easy for Peter. Nobody's crossed him much. It's lucky he never fell in love with Madam Betty!"

"Do him good!' she murmured sulkily.

"I'm not so sure, my dear. We've all seen that combination tried, and the only difference of opinion I ever heard as to the result concerned the amount of the alimony!

"Mattie has no such excuse as Mrs. Girard; she and Peter really have the same interests. She is as depend-

ent on her husband as ever your mother was. To put it plainly, Peter wants a business partner, a mistress, a mother of his children, and a friend, all in one, and is amply able to meet her on all these sides!"

"Have you thought of any title for this human chameleon?" she asked coldly.

"Certainly. Men call it a wife," he said.

"Then you're the most unreasonable sex in the world," she cried stormily, "and it serves you right that, when a woman can earn her own living, she won't marry any of you!"

"Granted, my child, granted instantly! But it's just that kind of woman we all want—that doesn't have to marry us, but wants to! And, of course, we've always been unreasonable. But you can't change that. So you must accept it."

Celestine smiled bitterly.

"That's a convenient doctrine of yours, isn't it?" she drawled. "All the horrors that you avoid are piled on us, and you tell us we must accept them."

"Well, mustn't you?" he said simply.

She drew a long breath.

"Where does all this lead, Doctor Stanchon?" she challenged him.

"Just to this, Mrs. Varnham," he answered, and met her eyes for the first time, so that she could not look past him.

"Your mother was unable even to respect her husband, but she had offered herself for sale and she paid the price, till he himself released her. Her motives were not high, perhaps, but she paid the price—the only price, by the way, that your father ever asked.

"Mrs. Girard may lack romantic devotion to her husband, but she pays him respect and solid friendship and

contributes a considerable share of their common expenses, besides administering their establishments very ably.

"Mattie Forsythe has, up to now, realized that her share of the matrimonial bargain could only be paid with an entire community of interests. She has neither your extraordinary physique and vitality nor Mrs. Girard's genius. It will take all she has to keep her husband contented and her affairs in order—so she has always given it—up to now," he repeated thoughtfully. "Just now she seems to be trying . . ." he paused.

"What do you give?" he demanded abruptly.

Celestine's flush deepened. Her lips narrowed.

"There has never been a minimum wage for wives," she said.

"Quite true," he agreed, "and a pity, in many cases. But in consideration of what services would you draw yours? Lutie tells me that you average seven hours a day at your present self-imposed tasks. You yourself told me, when we lunched with you in the country, that Dick's superintendent was in absolute control of the farm, and Dick makes it very clear that this butler of yours manages every detail of your city apartment.

"Apartments of that sort run themselves," she interjected briefly.

"To a large extent, yes. But what does Dick pay for that sort of apartment?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"In other words, he pays for the leisure you devote to affairs in which he has no stake nor interest even."

"He has complained to you, then?"

Her level tones were as cold as ice. *"How like her mother she is!"* he marveled.

"Never when he was quite himself," he said plainly,

"but I warn you, from now on, Mrs. Varnham, no one can be sure of your husband. His is a curious type of mind and his particular business needs a very clear head. He has always been more easily influenced than anyone but his old friends realized, and when I tell you that Williams has more control over him than I think proper——"

"Williams?" she cried, "a servant? What utter nonsense! I engaged him myself."

"Then you had better dismiss him," said the doctor briefly. "Dick has already lost one of his best clients because the man heard a pretty direct rumor that Williams had been sent out to buy some bonds for him with orders to use his own judgment!"

"I have never interfered with my husband's business."

Her lips were still firm, but her voice was barely audible now. He considered her warily, judged the time ripe, and struck hard.

"No, but you have no objection to living on it!"

She gasped, faltered, then loosened her grip on the chair-arms and hid her burning face in her great, silky muff, and her sobs showed him his victory.

"Not that it's anything but anger, really," he thought, *"but that's a great deal from her."*

Aloud he added: "Now, let us talk practically, my dear, or all this has been mere impertinence on my part and unnecessary forbearance on yours! Could you get Dick out in the country, do you think?"

That day Dr. Stanchon lunched at home. Even to Lucia, immersed in circulars and pamphlets, he looked drawn and old.

"Why, father! What *is* the matter? Mary, get some

Scotch for the doctor—oh, that telephone! I believe I'll have one on the table here."

"No, you won't, Lutie. Thanks, Mary, I *will* have some, I think. 'Morning, Fettauer, glad to see you!"

"He looks as if he'd been operating," said the surgeon keenly.

The doctor gulped down his glass.

"I have," he said shortly, "and it's a ticklish job, at my age, I can tell you."

"What do you mean? Really, father?"

Lutie's swift curiosity faded as she opened a long, official-looking envelope and glanced at the typewritten sheets.

"How perfectly bully!" she announced. "I tell you, that Celestine is a wonder! (Don't mind me, either of you, just eat along, won't you?) What do you think she's done now?"

"I'm sure she hasn't tried to eat as thick soup as this while opening envelopes," her father suggested mildly, "because she has too much sense. Please take Miss Lucia's mail away, Mary? Digestion is an important job, my child, and well worth the attention of even the Woman's Auxiliary."

"You're an old tyrant," she said good-naturedly, "and you deserve that I should lunch with the rest of the committee at the Waldorf. (Just leave me this one, Mary, if the doctor will allow you!) See here, Max, this proves what I was telling you last night about Mrs. Varnham: before she took over the office the stenographer did about as she pleased, and when she asked for another secretary, all right, she got it. Celestine thought that her budget was too large—she'd managed that milk bureau for the Tuberculous Parent Association, you know—and she took the chairmanship and went down in

the morning and stayed all day there, for a week. This is her report. Of course, you don't want me to go into it thoroughly—" the men smiled at her flushed cheeks and eager eyes—"but just listen to this!"

"I'll listen," said the young surgeon, laughing, "as soon as you've eaten a chop and some spinach—not a word before!"

"And hadn't you better tie on my bib, Doctor Fettauer?" she inquired mutinously, handing him the report with a dramatic gesture. He glanced at it in silence.

"I suppose you don't take it seriously?" she inquired, after a few minutes' pause.

"On the contrary, I take it very seriously," he returned, "and I should think it high time that Mrs. Varnham got down to the office! Do you mean to say that it never occurred to anyone that all personal telephone calls and stamps and paper *should* be paid for? That a typewriter who can't take dictation is expensive at any price? That valuable original documents should not be taken out of files by indiscriminate people? That card-catalogues are an indispensable part of any filing system?"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Science, don't be too hard on us!" she begged, "you know, we weren't any of us brought up in business offices!"

"That doesn't seem to have prevented your serene conviction that you are competent to manage them, however, does it?" he asked keenly.

"Well, Celestine can! Now that this thing is growing so, I don't know what we'd do without her."

"You'll have to find out, then, dear, for she's going up to the country to-morrow," said Doctor Stanchon.

"Up to the country? What do you mean? Why, father, she *can't!* You mean for the week-end?"

"I mean, indefinitely. Her husband is a very sick

man, Lutie—he can't live in the city; I had a long consultation with him last night—and he's retired from the firm and gone up to the farm."

"That's pleasant for Celestine," she said bitterly. "If you'll excuse me, both of you, I'll run over to the office and discuss this with her."

"You won't be able to," her father returned placidly, "she left on the noon train. (More sugar, Mary, please.) I will say for your friend, Lutie, she's quick in action, once she starts."

"I'm glad you admit it!" she flashed at him resentfully, "and I'll tell you one thing—I'll bet you she can manage the Auxiliary from the farm, and her precious Dick, too! Why you're all so interested in that man I cannot see, myself. He's been more trouble to Celestine . . . and now he drags her out to the country! Honest to goodness, Doctor Stanchon, I'm glad *I'm* not married—yet!"

"You see, Fettauer?"

The older man's despair was not all assumed, the young surgeon's squared shoulders not all a joke.

"We've got our job cut out, sir, nowadays, there's no doubt of it," he agreed.

"It's curious, though," the doctor ruminated, "the women don't care for poor Dick, and yet his friends would go through fire and water for him. And little Celestine, the same way. Lucia here and Mattie Forsythe and Mrs. Walter Girard swear by her, but Peter can't bear her, and I must admit I don't quite see what the girls like so much in her, though Lord knows she's clever enough. They say she's 'awfully square' and 'straight from the shoulder' and 'right on the job.' Well, well, I suppose you're young enough so that all that sounds perfectly reasonable to you?"

Fettauer nodded.

"I must say I find her very interesting," he agreed, "but then, I like the type. I never did care for 'beautiful sirens' and 'fascinating mysteries' and all the old stage properties, you know."

The doctor gasped.

"At least, you're well matched!" he cried, "fight it out between you—that's all!"

CHAPTER IX

The Backslider

AND what he frankly admitted to be a prejudice faded a little, a fortnight later, when, in answer to Celestine's brief note, he got out of the stuffy air of the train with a deep breath of relief, and piloted Lucia to the shining, two-wheeled cart where his hostess, enthroned as driver, waved her long-lashed whip over the restive cob.

"Just get into the car with Dick, Lutie—it's your last ride in it; I sold it yesterday!—I'm going to drive the doctor up," she explained, and at his surprised, "Sold the car?" she nodded brusquely and let the cob out.

"Yes. Dick keeps to that old argument about a car being cheaper, but of course that's only a phrase—it all depends. A light, inexpensive car, that you run yourself, probably is, with feed as high as it is now; but a big French machine with a hundred dollar man, over these roads, is quite another proposition. And when you consider that we have the entire stable plant and two sound horses, anyway, and the coachman can do a great deal besides, whereas Edouard simply makes trouble all the time, and has to have his meals separately —why there's no comparison."

"That sounds reasonable," he agreed. Yes, his prejudice was fading. Celestine, in trig tweed, a scarlet feather in her tight, small hat, knowing gauntlets and a wrist watch in a leather strap, tooling along over the

windy March roads, seemed less sharp and challenging, somehow, more pleasantly boyish.

"About Dick, doctor," she began abruptly, "I don't know exactly what to do. There's no golf yet and he never cared for riding. I'm afraid he's working pretty hard, and yet *I* have to, and of course he can't help being interested."

"How do you mean?"

"I suppose you didn't know he'd dropped thirty thousand in Brass Tacks?"

"As much as that? No."

"Well, he has. And—I don't know whether you know about Randall Fitch, but Dick only took him in because of the connection, and as a matter of fact he never brought in much, and now he is making a great fuss over all he says Dick has lost him. I got terribly bored by it, and finally I asked him to put a figure on it, and advised Dick to pay him."

"Really? That must have astonished Randall!"

"It did," said Celestine briefly. "But that and Brass Tacks made a big hole. And so, of course, it means economy. In order to get some idea of the average running expenses up here, I've been going over everything, and Dick is so restless, he simply has to help. The weather's been vile, up to to-day, and we've been at it pretty steadily. Of course, if you think that it's bad for him——"

"But I don't, my dear girl! I think it's the best possible thing for him! Dick's been a business man all his life—he can't settle down into a golf-fiend. And it's got to be something practical. I hope it'll be a long job."

"It will."

Celestine's voice was cold, as usual, but the competent ring of it was what struck him now.

"Henry—the superintendent—has made a great muddle of everything, it seems to me. He has hired a lot done that Dick ought to have expected him to do personally, and though the best machinery has been put in, he doesn't use it. Then, when he should have called an expert in—the pump, for instance, and all the new sewage-disposal system—he's pottered about, himself, with the local plumbers; and the bills they've run up!

"He's been breeding more cattle than the farm has ever carried, and they've already cost more than they'll ever be worth."

"Why, I didn't know you knew about this sort of thing!" he exclaimed with interest.

"I don't, much," she said shortly, "but I can add and subtract, Doctor Stanchon, and I've always told Dick that a place like this was terribly expensive. It takes all you can make on it to pay a man clever enough to run it."

"I suppose that's about right," he agreed thoughtfully. "Here! Where's that car turning off?"

"Oh, Dick's going 'round the long way," she answered, "he's going to show Lutie his new road. Down by the ice-pond entrance he's going to make a new road through the pasture. I don't think there's much sense in it, and I don't believe he knows much about road-making, but he thinks it will save hauling, and he's got three or four Italians to play with, and it'll keep him out of doors, bossing them, I thought."

He studied the straight, firm-chinned profile keenly.

"Mrs. Varnham," he said suddenly, "I begin to believe I have misjudged you a little."

"Probably not," she returned indifferently, "you never liked me, I know, but you're certainly a good friend to Dick."

"And you're another," he told her warmly.

She bit her lip and spoke severely to the cob.

They turned in at the rough stone gateposts, where last spring's honeysuckle still straggled, and she swept up smartly to the door of the wide-eaved, comfortable house. A handsome, awkward girl of fourteen, in outgrown riding clothes, rushed up to them, tossing back untidy braids of chestnut hair.

"Hello, people! Want me to take the horse round, mummy?" she called.

Celestine's cool gaze ran over the touzled, long-legged object as disinterestedly as if she had been a visitor.

"Thank you, but I think Healy is quite capable of his work, my dear," she said. "Suppose you suggest to him to go back and put on his coat and cap, and dress yourself for tea, before you appear again. Is Fräulein ill?"

The flushed and sullen creature chewed at her braids, muttered something inaudible, and dashed toward a shock-headed Irishman, who appeared again at incredibly short notice, capped and panting, buttoning himself vigorously.

Inside the great beamed living-room the doctor paused and glanced about admiringly.

"This is a little changed from my last visit," he said, with a quick vision of the tumbled furniture, the pipes and bottles, the wilted curtains of the big place, when he and Dick had camped in it for an unsuccessful three days' battle. Now, the bowls of flowers, the clear, tended fires, the fresh, aired, polished spaces, all welcomed the guest indescribably, without a word from host or hostess, as every well-trained country house should do.

"I doubt if there's as much difference as you think, doctor," she answered in her detached, cool voice. "The flowers, of course—I always have them—and I have

noticed that though men always call ruffled curtains messy and unnecessary, one has only to start the laundress at them, to be complimented on the 'home-like room'! As a matter of fact, Norah McCartey is a clean caretaker, though she's a wasteful cook, and if Fräulein polished that tomboy of mine half as much as she rubs the mahogany, she'd be more of a credit to me. Ah, Nancy, come in, and say how-do-you-do, and stop growing, for a few minutes, if you can!"

A metamorphosed tomboy in a crisp white frock with rose ribbons, stumbled over her neatly slippered feet and pushed a red but clean paw into the doctor's warm hand. Her burnished braids fell each side of her father's easy, twinkling eyes, the firm cleft of her mother's clean-cut chin turned to a soft dimple in Dick's weaker one.

"Oh—how do—mummy, I can't pass it—I break the cups!" she implored; but the implacable maternal nod drove her behind the jam and muffins, and rebelling, she obeyed.

"As a matter of fact, I don't think she cares much for the child," Stanchon grumbled to young Fettauer, who appeared miraculously in a six-cylinder runabout with a rakish nose, and begged for tea, "but I'll wager she'll lick her into fine shape, nevertheless, now she's here."

"Lucia told me she was fondest of the boy," the younger man admitted. "Varnham's looking better, isn't he? Pretty drawn yet, of course, but distinctly less jumpy, I thought."

"Come on and see the office, Lute!" cried the master of the house, "come on, all of you, and see Little Bright Eyes turn green with jealousy! I'll bet your convict-joint isn't a patch on Hawkfield headquarters!"

Dick, in squirish knickerbockers and belted jacket, his sulky suspicions and moodiness thrown off, one arm

about the shy, coltish girl beside him, was a pleasant sight to all his guests: Lucia regarded him with round eyes.

Up the broad, low stairs, past various chintz-hung vistas, he led them, flinging open a door at the end of the hall, whose business-like, tiny brass knocker he flapped derisively.

"I tell you," he crowed, "when the madam here gets busy, you see results!"

"For heaven's sake!" Lucia breathed, "Celestine, you wonder! It's just like the office!"

"It's bigger," said Celestine, calmly, but with appreciation of their surprise.

The shining roll-top desk with labeled pigeon-holes flanked such a leather-fendered fireplace as even the Woman's Auxiliary (which believed in doing itself well) had never dreamed of. On one wall a map of the county hung; on another a neat framed chart, labeled "Hawkfield Farm," showed road and pasture, gardens and ice-house, wood-lots and orchard, pond and green-house.

"Earth cellar!" Lucia read eagerly. "Tool house! Gardener's cottage! Proposed kennels! (O, Tina, are you going in for chows?) Pump house! Cold frames! Why, it's like a village!"

"And this looks like the excavation plans of the Geographical Society," Fettauer suggested with interest, adjusting an effective *pince-nez* to pore over the companion piece on the third wall, where mysterious hieroglyphs showed the underground tracks of water pipes, blind drains, and sewer lines.

"Would you believe it," Celestine turned to the appreciative guests, "nobody on this place knew where any of these pipes ran? I had to send for the original con-

tractor, somewhere in New Jersey, to make this map! And that precious superintendent of Dick's had a gang of Italians digging all over the shop, on the chance! A hundred and twenty a month, *he* drew."

"But Henry was a first-class mechanic, Tina, and understood all about the car!" his employer begged pathetically.

"Bosh! When did he ever see the car?"

Dick grinned, acquiescent. "You ought to've seen her bounce him! I never could have done it," he confided.

"I trust you observe that the young man from the State School handles the pump and the garden and does all the spraying and pruning and is a practical vet., besides bossing the concrete work and the incubators, for seventy!" she remarked, her eyes glancing over his shoulder.

"I want you to look at these agricultural reports," he turned to the men; "see the little holders they slip in? All on this shelf. Coachman put up the shelves and stained 'em. Great work, what? Henry would've rung in a carpenter on me. Matter of fact, there's a lot in those reports. They tell me Maude Adams made a fortune in telegraph poles, growing 'em, you know, on waste land! I'm going to thin out about twenty acres, and keep tabs on 'em. Know you could get 'em for three or four cents apiece, and plant 'em out? Government, by George!"

Stanchon smiled irrepressibly.

"Remember Horace Greeley's cabbages, Dick," he warned; "he said they'd only cost him a dollar and a half apiece, you know!"

"O, slush! He had a darn good time growing 'em, just the same!" crowed Dick, "and they shouldn't have cost that, anyhow, doctor!"

While they laughed, Lucia pried about indefatigably.

"What is in this glass case, Tina? Keys? Why the case? Will you *look* at the labels!"

"Nobody has any respect for them unless they're that way," the mistress replied imperturbably. "Henry kept them on a ring in his overalls, and I never knew where he was. Once the pump froze, and burst, Healy told me, and he was in town and nobody could get in. It flooded everything and took two weeks' work to mend it."

"And will you look at the switch-board! Do you really need card-catalogues, Tina, on a farm?"

"I should certainly never consent to manage one, without."

"Oh we're efficient! We're up-to-date!" Dick chuckled fulsomely. "I spent half the morning, for two days, fitting out the tool house, wholesale, from some big place out West. That man of mine bought a tack at a time from the hardware emporium at the village."

"At this rate, you'll recover all you lost in Brass Tacks," said the doctor slyly.

Dick winced.

"Oh, come!" he begged, "don't rub in it! But, honestly, we'll do it yet! With the apartment cut out, *and* the car, *and* Edouard—I say, if I ever sell the farm, later, it'll be a model. And property's going up, I tell you."

"Nobody wants to *buy* model farms, Dicky," vouchsafed Lucia sententiously, "they want to *make* them model! And property's always going up. So nobody can buy it, anyhow."

Fettauer grinned delightedly.

"All very well," thought the older doctor, *"he likes them clever. But will he like that cleverness when it turns against him, some day? I wonder! Ah, well, the*

young ones must fight it out—they must fight it out!"

"Of course you got all those wholesale ideas from the paper and ink and stuff you sent for at the office," Lucia suggested coldly. "I suppose you know Miss Ferris threatens to resign? She says it was one thing working under you, but too many of the Committee are butting in. How much time are you going to give us, anyway? We have 4,642 members now, and more coming in every day. There'll have to be a separate file for the good-conduct men's over-time work, and Peter told Mattie that Miss Ferris ought to be more heavily bonded. We've had to get a city auditor, now. Are you coming in for the special meeting on the sixteenth? Did you know that the Warden from the Ohio State Prison is going to speak? The papers are awfully interested."

"Of course I'm coming in. You'll have to get a regular welfare worker, I'm afraid; Ferris is never going to be able to manage that end of it. For goodness' sake, raise her, if she kicks, Lute!"

"Oh, that's all very well. But where's the money to come from? You ought to see Marie Fitch's bill for traveling expenses!—Look here, Dick! If you're going to bury Tina away off here and take all the time she gave us, I think the least you can do is to give us the money she saves you by all this efficiency business! Now, what do you say?"

The other men stared at each other aghast, but Dick chewed a reflective forefinger.

"Well, Lutie, that's fair enough," he said thoughtfully, "of course, it *is* all her own time!"

"Du Liebe!" gasped the surgeon, "what a country!"

"You'd better let 'em marry each other, my young friend!" growled Lucia's father. But no one heeded him.

"Of course I don't mean the cost of the apartment and the car and Edouard," pursued Lucia, generously. "I only mean all this retrenching business, and the difference between Henry and the new man, and—and all that."

"Would that be all right, Dick?" said Celestine, and Doctor Stanchon caught an unwonted appeal in her eyes, fixed frankly on her husband's, now, that stirred him strangely.

"Why, sure, Tina, sure!" Dick answered simply, "why not? You can't go back on 'em entirely."

"And they wonder why we like him," the doctor mused, *"but I'll back 'em both, now, I'll back 'em both!"*

"It's a very good thing," Lucia commented sagely, as the train rocked along to the city of her zealous labors, "a *very* good thing, that Celestine Varnham married exactly that sort of man. She would never be happy without *something* to run, and though I must say that I prefer a less cold blooded fish than that precious Dicky, and one that could manage his own business better, still, Celestine could never stand anything romantic, and she seems to like him better when she's bossing him!"

"I should say that you've diagnosed that ménage very well," her father replied contentedly, "it takes all sorts, you know. . . ."

"Humph!" said Lutie, "just wait till she's had enough, and Mr. Dicky can be trusted alone.—Oh, I'm not a *perfect* fool, father! She'll be running the Committee again, all right!"

But on a brilliant Saturday morning in May, while the six-cylinder runabout snorted impatiently before their door, she appeared before him, gloomy under her artfully draped motor-veil.

"Max is going to take me out to Hawkfield," she

announced curtly. "Celestine is too disgusting. Of course, it's her own affair, but, really, she can't expect us to believe that she's manicuring that foolish farm *every* minute! Just because Dick gives her all that she saves, the miserly thing keeps on saving more, and she says it's too much to give us, now. She says she could run a big business on our budget, and it's really a charity—the idea! And when I asked her last Sunday if she couldn't give us one solid day a week, she laughed in my face!

"'It's your time and your personal interest we want, Celestine—anyone can give money,' I told her, and what do you think she said?

"'I'm really too busy, my dear, to go into it—won't you take a check?'

"Just like a man, in her silly old office! You'd think she was in business!"

"And so she is, my dear, so she is!" her father called after her, chuckling delightedly. "I hope you'll be, some day."

"She's a backslider—that's what she is!" her rebellious voice floated up to him.

And again, "I hope you'll be—some day! Give my regards to your chauffeur!" he shouted.

And as they chugged off, again he chuckled.

CHAPTER X

The Firm

"IT is moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn," said Lucia mechanically, "all in favor of this motion. . . ."

There was a scented rustling. Two sable neckpieces bent low over the leashes of two intertwined Pomeranians; an amber-shaded bird-of-paradise plume dipped gracefully to the recovery of a gold-meshed handbag. Marie Fitch grinned maliciously at her little neighbor.

"I've often wondered why we don't adopt that dog-fight as a regular closing ceremony," she whispered, "let that be the motion, and when Her Highness picks up that bag, call it the seconding!"

Her neighbor flashed a scared glance at the bird-of-paradise, dangerously near them. But she was too delighted to have been the confidante of the famous Mrs. Ranny Fitch to fail in her reply.

"It does seem to be the one thing we always do in the same way," she admitted shyly. "I—I didn't think we accomplished so very much to-day, did you? And I broke my dentist's appointment, too."

Marie smiled, but loyalty to what a popular novelist would call "her caste" prevented any widening of this conversational opening. The little neighbor had been asked to join the Committee because of her curious but definite ability to wheedle large subscriptions out of

hitherto unheard-of millionaires: her personal views on Prison Reform were not required.

"Oh, I don't know," she said tolerantly, "these big boards are difficult to handle, you know. I've been on a great many, and they seem to have to be done this way. Of course the directors can't go into all these details with the board as a whole."

"Oh, of course not! And Miss Stanchon is so wonderful, isn't she?"

"Yes, indeed," Marie agreed gravely, "she's really born for this sort of thing—hello, Celestine—you don't say you're back in the fold?"

"Not so you'd notice it, particularly," and Celestine Varnham put her arm over Marie's shoulder affectionately. "What makes you look so tired, my dear? I just dropped in to see you all, and Lucia made me stay through the meeting. I told her I didn't believe it was according to Hoyle, exactly. . . ."

"Oh, well, what Lutie doesn't know about parliamentary law would need a new office to hold it!"

They laughed intimately: the little neighbor realized that they were out of her depth.

"I thought I'd lunch with the crowd—were you going anywhere, 'specially? Come on with me, and I'll lunch you all at my new club."

"Great idea, Tina! You must be feeling awfully wealthy, my dear—I judge eggs are going up?"

"Oh, you idiot! In April? Why, everything on two legs is laying day and night! I'm down to forty cents—forty-five delivered in town. But we're bottling our water now—I say, Lutie, will you take Hawkfield table water for the office?"

"Why not?" Lucia answered across the din of leave-takings, luncheon appointments, and telephone messages.

But she did not turn her head. The two older women smiled significantly.

"Of course, we can't pay more than for Ferncliff water," Lucia went on, telephone receiver at ear, pencil in hand. ("Who is this, please? Not at all, I don't want the secretary, I want Mr. Siegelheim, himself! What do you think I am—an office boy?) Miss Ferris, what do we pay for Ferncliff water? Look and see, please. (Oh, how do you do, Mr. Siegelheim! This is Miss Stanchon of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Prison Reform, you know.—Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Siegelheim! I understand that there is a possibility of our getting the use of your employees' baseball team for our charity game for the League? O, yes, indeed, Mr. Goldberg and Mr. Rosenstein agreed long ago! Now, that's very good of you, Mr. Siegelheim! I'll see that all the details are sent you.—What? A hundred? Now, that is really kind—Mr. Goldberg only gave us fifty!—Indeed I will, with pleasure, Mr. Siegelheim, any day you like. *Good* bye)! Can't you get this office cleared out, Miss Ferris? I've got work to do, here. . . . Indeed, yes, Mrs. . . . er—er," turning to the little neighbor, "we all appreciate what you've done tremendously: I wish I had more like *you* on my committee!—Every single one of those last circulars is wrong, Miss Ferris—will you ask the stenographer to step here?"

"For heaven's sake, Lucia, hang up that receiver! You can't take it to bed with you, can you?"

Celestine advanced with determination and planted herself in front of the harassed figure in the swivel-chair. "Come on out to lunch with us and stop scowling —I'm not Mr. Siegelheim!"

"'Can't possibly," said Lucia briefly. "Are you ready to go over those circulars, Marie? They're all wrong,

you know. I shall bounce that stenographer to-morrow."

"Marie's going with us. Come on, my dear, be a sport! We'll let you off early," Celestine persisted.

"You can't very well let me off, for I sha'n't be on," said Lucia briefly. "Marie will do as she pleases, of course, but I've ordered some sandwiches in. I can't leave till four. Then I *must* go."

"Pleasant for Mr. Fiancé," Marie commented drily, "I never was much of a crystal-gazer, but I foresee a jolly motor-ride for him, at four, with mademoiselle in this frame of mind! Don't tease her, Tina—she's young, you know, and it's all gone to her head a little. I told her I'd stay here, and I won't go back on it. Good bye—see you later."

The last thin silhouette had slipped through the door, the last good bye was swallowed in the descending lift.

"Open the windows, Marie, for the love of heaven, and air this place out!" Lucia muttered irritably. "I believe that what's-her-name woman takes her bath in chypre! It always gives me a headache. I'd like to send her a bottle of listerine!"

Marie threw up the sashes in silence. The faithful Miss Ferris moved deftly about, putting back the chairs, collecting the odd papers, evening the window shades. Lucia threw herself back till the patient swivel creaked.

"Ouf! I'm tired!" she said.

"Those meetings would tire an ox," Marie agreed, "but wasn't Her Majesty killing? Do you suppose she hands out that sort of talk to her husband? I wonder if she ever really had a thought in her life?"

"God knows," replied the benefactress of prisoners, listlessly. "But I'm glad I'm not him. When do you think those sandwiches will get here, Miss Ferris?"

"I think there's the boy, now, Miss Stanchon," said

the plump and patient secretary. She adored Lucia: only her adoration enabled her to swallow her college training, as Marie said, and insert her tactful personality between the sharp edges of the temperaments of her employers. It was never knowing what Miss Stanchon was going to do, she said, that made her so interesting. Sometimes she would sit glum for hours, smoking endless cigarettes with the faithful telephone receiver; sometimes she would catch Miss Ferris about her tightly corseted waist and violently teach her the *tango;* sometimes she interrupted her coolly, with raised brows and a tone that the younger and better educated woman would never have tolerated from anyone but Lucia.

Now she received the tray in silence from the freckled office boy, only raising her brows expressively at the single bottle on the white napkin.

"Aren't you lunching, Miss Ferris?"

"Not here, Miss Stanchon—I thought you might have things to talk over with Mrs. Fitch, perhaps. I'll be back later. Are the sandwiches all right? I told them especially about the French mustard."

"You're a regular brick, Miss Ferris!" and Lucia untwisted her forehead and flashed her the smile that more than paid the girl for all the nervous fatigue of the day.

"Will Mrs. Fitch have some ale, too?" the secretary asked, her hand on the door-knob.

"She won't have any of this," Lucia returned imperturbably, "want to send for some, Marie?"

"No, thanks—I never drink it, Miss Ferris——"

"Afraid of her figure!" Lucia jeered. "Thank heaven, *I'm* not vain!"

"Just keep on with a pint of ale a day, and you'll never have any excuse for being, my dear," said Marie pla-

cidly. "Are there any chicken sandwiches? And I told that boy French vichy—Henry! Henry!"

"I'll send it up, Mrs. Fitch, Henry's gone for his lunch. If you want me, Miss Stanchon, just telephone and they'll page me at the grill-room. Good bye."

"That girl's a gilt-edged treasure," said Lucia solemnly, as the door closed gently. She poured out her ale and bit hungrily into a neat, crusty rectangle, with one gesture.

"Heavens, but I'm starved! Marie, how *can* you keep thin? Have a roast-beef—they're corking."

"I'm off red meats," quoth Marie, nibbling. "Ferris certainly is an investment. But then, look what we're paying! Fourteen hundred, and six weeks' vacation, and her lunch half the time—that's something, you know, Lucia."

Lucia was in the midst of a long, luxurious swallow, and only shook her head impatiently.

"That's all very well, Marie (I'd rather have that stuff than all the champagne *brut* ever bottled!) but you must remember she turned down sixteen, with that College Women's Bureau, if we'd raise her to fifteen in the fall—which I shall do."

"Oh, really?"

"Certainly. She's worth it. Hand me another, will you, Marie, and take one yourself? You don't mean to say that's all you eat for lunch?"

"It certainly is, till I get back to one hundred and thirty. I'm only supposed to have Bent biscuit with the vichy, really."

"For heaven's sake!"

"But then, I take what I like for dinner, you see. It's really the best way. Black coffee and dry toast in the morning——"

"Oh, you make me sick, Marie! See if those brown-bread ones are Swiss cheese, will you? Thanks. Where does that ass of a Henry hide the matches?"

Lucia subsided into an appeased silence, and the atmosphere of the office loosened tension almost visibly before them. An early street-organ sounded not unpleasantly in the distance; from where the Chairman of the Woman's Auxiliary tipped her swiveled seat the new green of the trees in the little mid-city park stained the vivid April blue.

"You know, this is an awfully pretty place for an office!" said Lucia dreamily.

Marie grinned.

"Before you've been stoked at noon, I'd hate to have the office at Palm Beach or—or Aiken," she suggested. "Afterwards, any subway station would look beautiful."

"No, but honestly," and Lucia smiled appreciatively, "I don't believe there's a better feeling in the world than when you've worked hard all the morning, and then clear all the idiots out and have a good lunch! It's—it's"—Miss Stanchon struggled with a somewhat limited vocabulary, gave it up, and ended—"it's great!"

Marie nodded comprehendingly.

"Of course," she said, "everybody who ever worked knows about that. The only funny thing about it is that you girls haven't found it out sooner. And you make such a fuss about it—why, Miss Ferris has had all your sensations for years, and probably never notices them."

"Don't you believe it! Ferris and I have a whole lot of heart-to-hearts that you don't know about!"

"Don't doubt it, my dear. But Ferris would swear black was white, to please you. So remember to discount it."

"Nonsense!"

Lucia flushed a little.

"But of course she likes me—I know that."

"Likes you? Why do you suppose she stays? Not for the pleasure of putting up with these wrangling women, I hope! My dear child, that's your greatest point in this work, next to your enthusiasm—your power of attaching people and getting them to work for you."

Lucia played with her chased silver cigarette case and bit her lip.

"Oh, I don't know about that," she began, but Marie went on firmly.

"Well, it's true, whether you know it or not," she said briskly. "We all know it, and that's why we put up with a lot of things we don't always like. Now don't get wrathy, Lucia, you can't scare *me!* That's what we're going to miss the most, when you leave."

"When I leave? When I *leave?*"

Lucia's feet dropped from the chair she was using as a foot-stool; the match box slipped from her hand to the floor.

"What *do* you mean, Marie Fitch?" she cried.

"There, there, my dear, be calm!"

Mrs. Fitch shook out the last drops of her vichy and washed her fingers daintily with them.

"That makes a pint and a half a day," she added thoughtfully, "and Betty swears you can take off two pounds a week on vichy, alone. Why, all I mean, my dear, is that after October—the twenty-seventh, isn't it? —we can hardly count on quite so much work from you, can we?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, don't be mulish, Lutie! You see what I mean, perfectly well."

"Why not?" Lucia repeated coldly.

"Oh, Lord!"

Marie's brows arched dangerously.

"I should suppose," she began with great restraint, "that Mrs. Max Fettauer's time could hardly be so free as Miss Lucia Stanchon's."

And again Lucia asked,

"Why not?"

Marie glanced about the business-like apartment.

"I don't see anything just the right size and shape to throw at you, Lute, or I'd get up and get it," she said. "But as I have really, *au fond,* a gentle and generous nature, I'll simply go on with the conversation. Do I understand that you are planning to get down to the office at ten, and spend the day here, or dashing about between here and Ossining, or interviewing possible employers of convict labor from here to the Battery, until tea-time?"

Lucia opened her lips, but her friend rose hastily and stood with a threatening arm outstretched.

"Now, if you say 'Why not' again, Lutie darling, I'll throw the matches out of the window—and there's only that one box!" she added warningly.

Lucia grabbed for the little yellow carton, missed it, dived helplessly at Marie's supple, escaping figure, and capitulated.

"Don't you dare!" she cried, and then, "Well, if I can't say 'Why not' I'll have to ask you why in heaven's name I shouldn't continue to do what interests me as well as you? You're at your place, at two hundred and two, three mornings a week, aren't you, and out hunting stuff the rest of the time? And you've been Mrs. Randall Fitch a long time, haven't you?"

"A long time, yes," the older woman repeated, "twenty-

two years—as long as I was Miss Marie Trimblee, in fact. But I hadn't any place at two hundred and two then, Lutie, and I wasn't out hunting stuff."

"No, naturally you weren't, because girls didn't do that so much, then."

"But you won't be a girl, Lucia—you'll be a married woman. And they sometimes develop other responsibilities."

"You didn't," said Lucia brusquely.

"No. I didn't," Marie repeated slowly, "that's true enough."

"Very well—why should I, then—for the first few years? I never could see why everything should happen at once, anyway," pursued Lucia argumentatively.

"That's what I said."

Marie shuffled through the files of reports and pledges that lay, neatly stacked, on the big table near her, staring at the little printed pages with empty eyes.

"That's just what I said, Lutie, my dear, and the first few years passed by and—and I haven't any, now."

"You mean that you really wanted——"

"I mean that I can give you a list, any time you want it, of women I know who've saved out those 'first few years'—and have nothing to show for the others," said Marie Fitch somberly.

"It's quite true and logical, what you say, my dear girl, but, somehow, Nature seems to intend all those responsibilities to come at once. I don't know why, but it seems to be the game. And when you get to my age, you accept the game as it is, you don't try to improve the rules. You simply try to win any way you can."

"Your age!"

Lucia swept the trim figure with a gaze persistently light and on the surface, but Marie met her squarely,

and the force of the older woman's personality vanquished even friendly joking.

"Yes, my age," she said, "it's there, Lucia, though I can out-ride you and out-skate you, and I know it as well as you do. I hate to see you make a fool of yourself—and Max."

"Oh, you needn't bother about Max, Ri-ri—we've had it all out, and he thinks just as I do."

"Um," said Marie sceptically, "he wants to marry you, Lutie, and of course he thinks just as you do."

"Now, there's where you're dead wrong!"

Lucia swung the swivel-chair sharply.

"Max is no such fool! I wouldn't have any respect——"

"O, I know, I know!"

Marie smiled, a little sadly.

"I know all about that, my dear," she said. "It's queer how you never change, you girls, in *that* way! All the modern feminism in the world never has succeeded there, has it? So Max agrees to the office and the motoring to Sing Sing, and all the rest, after October?"

"Max wants me to do exactly as I think is best."

Lucia uttered this brilliant conviction with all the fervor of a Columbus, and the other woman looked back along that road of rose-blinded youth behind her, and sighed.

"Because he thinks he knows what you will think is best," she said thoughtfully. "What does Doctor Stanchon say?"

"Father? Oh, father's just the same old angel of a brick you might know he'd be. He says, 'Work it out yourselves, children, work it out yourselves!' You know he never turned a hair when Max refused to live with us?"

"That *was* stunning of him! Your father's a wonder, Lutie!"

"Isn't he?" and Lucia's smile was so exactly the doctor's own that Marie smiled back, unguarded, as she did to few people beyond Doctor Stanchon. And it was that smile that unlocked something in his daughter's breast that all her years of friendship with Marie Fitch could never have melted. Rising from her chair she crossed over to the table near the older woman and sat lightly on a corner of it, brushing the reports away.

"Marie," she said, and her earnestness and confidence swept youth and innocence into her face as a painter's brush will sweep youth and innocence into the canvas he works on, "Marie, I'm going to tell you something. Nobody knows it but father and Max and me. This winter I'm to be paid for working."

"Paid? Why, Lucia, how? Who——"

"I'm going to have definite charge of all this prison work in the east, around New York. My job is to be turned into a Working Chairmanship—like what they call a field secretary on some of those boards—and I'm to have fifteen hundred a year for the equivalent of three days' work a week. Then Ferris will stay—she handed in her resignation when she heard about October."

"But, child, you're not going to tie yourself hand and foot just to keep Ferris? Do you appreciate at all the difference it will make, or——"

"Of course I appreciate it, idiot!" cried Lucia, "what do you take me for? I know just what I have to expect, believe me, Marie Fitch! But I'm perfectly willing to call my own bluff: I've talked a lot about being the same thing as a real working woman—heaven knows, I've worked harder than any one in *this* office, except

Ferris!—and I've seen enough of my friends making good, not to know that I can."

"But—but it isn't quite the same, is it, Lucia?"

Marie was clearly, to use their easy-going vernacular, "staggered." Her eyes searched Lucia's curiously.

"You're certainly a good little sport, Lutie dear," she went on quietly, "and I'm the last woman in the world to discourage you from wage earning, in one way. Personally, I regard my own financial independence as the greatest comfort of my life. But . . . but . . ."

"But you don't want me to have that comfort? Thank you, Marie!"

"Don't be unfair, Lute—it isn't that."

"Well, then, what is it? You can hardly say I'll lose socially—look at yourself!"

"I know. Things have grown so different, that way. What does Max think of that end of it?"

Lucia met her friend's eyes squarely, but with a little effort.

"Oh, I don't want to lie about this, Marie," she said frankly, "I don't believe Max is awfully anxious to have me do it!"

Marie laughed drily.

"Thank you for being honest, child," she said, "and I know Max, you know!"

"But he sees the point," Lucia pursued slowly, weighing her words, now, "and after a certain conversation that we had one evening, he and dad and I, he can't very well stand in my way. It was he, I always felt, that brought father to reason—you know father offered me what I could earn as field secretary, last year, to drop this work and consider myself his professional housekeeper."

"Really?"

Marie leaned forward, deeply interested. "I always said it must come to that," she muttered, half to herself, "if the men don't want us in the office, they must pay us for the home job, that's all. But why didn't you accept, Lutie? It wouldn't have taken all your time to run that establishment—then you'd have been that much to the good."

Lucia looked at her quizzically. And in that look, though she never guessed it, lay the difference that the fifteen years between them had already made—so fast have standards changed.

"Isn't that a little . . . it's not cricket, exactly, is it, Marie?" she asked, almost shyly. "If father hired a housekeeper, she couldn't quite do that sort of thing, could she?"

Marie drew a long breath.

"I suppose not, Lute," she said, "I suppose not. You're quite right, of course, and I'm a bounder, to think of it. But when I went through all this, you see, my father and my—*my* Max (she looked away from Lucia) were not quite so well trained. It makes a difference."

Lucia wanted to take her hand, but dared not. Some echoes of Mr. Leroy Trimblee's vivid career had penetrated even to his daughter's younger friends, and no one ever spoke of Randall Fitch to his wife, unless by definite invitation.

"So, as I don't care for housekeeping, I preferred to stick to my old allowance and just do what I could on the Board, which of course I'd naturally do, anyhow," she went on hastily, "and Max backed me up. He told father that this prison work was what I had a real gift for, and I had just as much right to it as—as you have to the decorating business, for instance, or Betty Girard to art. And he can't go back on that now, very well,

can he? It applies to him just as much as it did to dad, doesn't it?"

Marie looked down at her nervous, ringed little hands, twisting and untwisting on her knees.

"I don't know, Lucia, I don't know," she said softly, "I suppose it does, but . . . I don't know."

"Well, why don't you know?" Lucia burst out impatiently, "what's the difference?"

"O Lucia, you've never been married!" Marie cried helplessly, "you don't understand!"

"Apparently not," said Miss Stanchon sulkily, "but if it means that every reasonable statement you make, under any other circumstances, doesn't apply to married people, I'm beginning to think I'd rather *not* understand!"

"I know. . . . I know. . . ." Marie's smile was wistful. "It seems idiotic. And if you are thirty years old, and can earn your own living, and have an allowance besides, and everybody treats you like a girl and yet gives you the independence of a woman—oh, it's no wonder so many of you don't marry!"

"You certainly have to want to a lot," Lucia agreed thoughtfully.

"And it seems to me you're wanting it less and less. I know I'd have called myself badly in love, twenty years ago, with less of an affair than you had with little Van Wynken."

"Oh, Van!"

"That's all very well, my dear, but you were what we used to call in love. And the calm way you analyzed it and decided just about what it was worth . . ."

"Oh well, I was older, Ri-ri."

"Yes, but you didn't feel any older than I did at twenty. And we all treat you pretty young, Lutie."

"I know."

Lucia looked hard at her friend. Never had Marie been so intimate, so unguarded; instinctively the younger woman pushed her opportunity.

"I told Max I'd meet him at your place at four," she said tentatively, "why don't we start along, now? There'll be nothing now Ferris can't handle—it's Saturday, you know."

"All right. Has Max made up his mind what he wants for that present?"

"Either a sun-dial or some little garden statue or other. This man was at Johns Hopkins with him and Max knows the girl, too. She's a doctor, too, you know, and they'll practice together in the country when they're married: Max says she's a better surgeon than the man is."

"How funny! If I were a doctor, I don't think I'd like that."

"Oh, I don't know," said Lucia tolerantly, "why not?"

Marie shook her head as they slipped on their fur collars and went out of the quiet office: even the telephone had succumbed to the half holiday.

"Well, well, it's a matter of taste, I suppose," she admitted, "but somehow, to-day, Lutie, I feel my age. I've always stood between you and your father, more or less, but just now I feel I'm quite over the line, with him!"

"Nonsense!" and Lucia linked arms companionably, "don't be an ass, Ri-ri!—Here, taxi—you free?"

They stepped into the orange taxicab, lightly, athletically, with a free swing from the hip. Marie's thin, square shoulders; her pale, coin-clear profile, framed in the modish, cap-like hat clear to the little ears; her hard, bright glance, all made her fifteen years' experience seem

incredibly unimportant beside Lucia's vigorous, confident personality. If anything, the older woman's knowledge had softened and intimidated her: Lucia, in a crisis, would have gone straighter to the point, shouldered her way more maturely through the inessential, one felt.

Spring whispered through the New York side streets. Hyacinths and daffodils filled the window boxes and the florists' pavements. That curious tang of the sea beaches, that sometimes sets in through the stony city, breathed the marshes and the wharves into the cab, and relaxed their taut nerves. As they stopped near a great puddle where sparrows bathed and twittered in reflected blue, cloud-dappled, they sighed softly.

"You can't work, these days," said Lucia, and Marie shook her head, but did not speak.

"Don't you love these days?" Lucia went on, her gray eyes drooping as the sun struck across her thick molasses-colored hair. "I feel as if everything was going to happen.—Oh, I do like town in the spring!"

"Love them? Heavens, no!"

Marie's mouth was a hard line; three straight creases appeared in her smooth forehead.

"I loathe them like the devil!" she said between her teeth.

"Why, why . . . Marie! What is it?"

"Oh, only that I'm forty-four and three months!" said Mrs. Ranny Fitch, lightly, "let it go at that! I like it better when it's too hot or too cold, my dear—no perfect weather for me, thank you!"

"But you haven't always . . . you didn't——"

"Oh, Lord, no! That's the trouble. Here, here, driver! This is two hundred and two!—Nonsense, Lucia, I'll pay my half."

"Not at all—all my taxis this week were from the

stables. They were charged, and I might as well get used to paying, you know, some time."

"There's something in that," Marie agreed, "do you know you use taxis a lot, Lutie?"

"My dear girl, I have to! I haven't the time to walk, as dad's always preaching. My time's too valuable."

"At fifteen hundred a year?" said Marie swiftly, leaving the bronze lift and drawing out a key for the heavy oak door with, *M. Randall Fitch, decorator. Country house and garden fittings particularly,* in old English lettering in the center panel.

"Oh, well. . . . I'm not down to that, yet," said Lucia easily.

"No. But you're not up to it, either, are you?"

"What do you mean, Ri-ri?"

They were in the big studio, which the heavy curtains dimmed mysteriously. Against green lattices on the rough gray stucco walls the great stone vases stood out softly; English ivy wreathed old bits of balustrade; quaint fiddle-back settees jostled marble benches; here and there the metal of odd sun-dials glowed gently.

"What do I mean?"

Marie stripped off her coat and reached out for a shrine-shaped flower holder in heavily wrought iron.

"A pair of these for each side of an entrance porch is very effective," she said, "I should keep nasturtiums in them and carry out the torch effect—why, my child, I mean that as a matter of fact you never earned fifteen hundred a year in your life. That's all."

"Oh, of course . . . but the work I do——"

"All very well, and you certainly have your results to show. But if you think you're worth as much more than fifteen hundred as you seem to imply—why, ask for it, and see if you can get it."

"Oh, I know that. But still, Marie, I think perhaps you underestimate——"

"Bosh!" Mrs. Fitch interrupted rudely, "I'm the last woman to underestimate you, Lucia. Your energy and high spirits and vitality and magnetism have a distinct value—in any market. You have a clear head and the gift of making all your friends enthusiastic where you are. By following every idea that comes into your head, you naturally follow some good one—you're bound to. But do you suppose the bureau that we got Ferris from would recommend you? Do you suppose they would class you with her, for a moment?"

"Why, of course, she's a trained——"

"Exactly. And she's worth fifteen hundred in the open market. But you don't see her going about in taxis, nor any man, on that salary. In other words, their time really isn't worth as much as that. You can value yours any way you want—and at present you seem to be using a vague sort of opinion, as your standard of value."

Lucia smiled bravely.

"At any rate, Ri-ri dear, your opinion about me isn't very vague, is it?" she asked, fingering the iron vases.

"I'm not a vague person," Marie conceded bluntly. "And since we're on the subject, my dear, who offers this famous fifteen hundred of yours? Not the Board, surely? I thought we were six hundred short on this year's budget."

"Good gracious, no! The Board, indeed! No; three men are putting up five hundred a year apiece, for three years. A funny old patient of Max's, that I called on at a sanatorium, and told about what we were doing, to cheer him up, is one; Mattie Forsythe's uncle, and somebody that little woman that gets so much money

for us—what is her name?—got hold of. She wanted to get five to give three hundred apiece, but this seemed easier. Uncle Henry's very much interested."

"So I see," said Marie drily. "And he's much interested in the new *tango* steps you teach him, too, isn't he?"

"O well . . ." Lucia grinned, "that may have something to do with it, but still, he could get *tango* lessons cheaper, you know, Ri-ri! The other man is Huyler or Maillard or some one of the big chocolate people—always crazy about prisons, it seems. He read an account of one of our athletic field-days, and wrote Miss Ferris to ask if he could help, and she set little Mrs.—is it Walters, or Williams?—on him. Isn't it wonderful, the money people have, that you never heard of?"

"I wish they'd hand me some of it," Marie suggested, "we haven't cleared but a hundred and eighty-five dollars over our expenses this month."

"So you don't ride in taxis?" Lucia added with a friendly slap on the shoulder.

"So I don't ride in taxis," Marie repeated. "No, I take a Madison Avenue car."

"With these around your neck!" and Lucia touched the matched pearls that circled the slender throat under the filmy gauze of Marie's blouse.

The older woman shrugged her shoulders. "They were given me," she said, "I didn't earn them. It's not my idea of an investment, but it was Ranny's—at the time—and I regard them merely as something to fall back on. They're not real, you know: the real ones are in safe deposit. These are the most perfect imitations he has ever seen, Marcus tells me—a funny little old French jeweler did them for me as a labor of love. I sold the wood-work of his old family house for a whopping price to a rich tobacco man, and he put it into a

big country place in Virginia. He makes the best imitation jewelry in Europe—I mean, he's the real workman. His firm doesn't know about this."

"How did you happen to take this up, Marie?" said Lucia, suddenly, looking around the great, full room, so cleverly crowded, so deftly suggestive of leisure and luxury, yet touched with the same grave, costly simplicity that made Marie's clothes the envy of her less gifted friends. "You didn't really have to, did you?"

"That depends on what you mean by 'have to.'"

Marie moved to a shadowy corner and pulled a garden bench forward, rested a battered lion's-mouth fountain against it and stepped back to get the effect.

"That's a bully old lion, isn't it?" she said musingly.

Then, without turning her head, she went on, "of course, I had no idea it would work into this. You see, we hadn't any money especially, when I came out, to begin with. Papa had lost about everything on those stables of his, and he and mamma had had so much money for so long, they simply couldn't change their ways. Aunty gave me my coming-out party, and of course it was understood that I was to take up my first eligible offer. Sue and Baby had done pretty well, you see, and I was supposed to be prettier than either of them. I could ride anything on four legs and Ranny could, too, in those days; and though he hadn't as much as mamma would have liked, papa thought they could make a fortune together, schooling green hunters, and he and old Father Fitch were great pals, anyway. I thought it was great fun being engaged, and Ranny got up a quadrille on horseback for me, and of course we knew everybody, and everybody was nice to us. The other girls were crazy about him, and I was proud to have got him."

TO-DAY'S DAUGHTER

She sat on the corner of a cane-backed oaken hall-seat and studied her polished nails. Except for her low voice, the room was very still.

"Well," she said after a moment, "so much for that! Ranny says we all get what's coming to us, sooner or later, and probably that's so. It might have been different, with children—I don't know. . . . Anyway, after about five years of it, your father advised us to go with him, and a rich old patient of his who wanted company, to Bermuda—they called them the Bermudas, then, it seems to me. I had a kind of cough I couldn't shake off, and Ranny was—was a little more flagrant than usual. There was a beautiful girl in Ellen Terry's company, and he persisted in buying her diamond bracelets, with all the tradesmen in town dunning us. So we sailed off to Bermuda, and before we started back he and I had a dreadful quarrel, and in order to bring me to reason, as he put it, he went off on a fruit steamer and left me there. Your father had taken his old gentleman on to the Azores, but I was too bad a sailor. His party broke up there, and he supposed I'd gone home with Ranny. I hadn't a cent of money and I suppose Ranny thought that would bring me to reason."

"What a beastly thing to do!"

"Oh, well, it's all past and gone, my dear. You see, my father had four daughters and a racing stable—he had no allowance for me, after I married."

Lucia blushed.

"Well, I was too proud to write, and I wouldn't have yielded my point to save my life. After two weeks, I asked a young officer who was quartered there with his regiment to sell a sapphire ring my godmother gave me for a wedding present, for me, if he could. He—he was

awfully fond of me, poor boy, and he had a rich sister-in-law visiting him on a cruise. She gave eight hundred dollars for it, and I paid my bill at the hotel and went home quietly. Ranny was perfectly amazed—and perfectly furious. I left him and went for a long visit to my oldest sister, who was building Gable Ends, then, and crazy for old stuff to furnish with.

"I saw the prices she was paying, and offered to save her money, if she'd wait for me. You see, I had picked up a beautiful old chair for a dollar, on one of my walks among the negro cabins, to take home to her for a present, and that gave me an idea. So I went back to Bermuda, and with what I had left of my eight hundred I bought all I could lay my hands on out of the houses there. It was a perfectly untouched field, my dear—I got willow ware and pie-crust tables from the darky huts, and once I found a hand-carved mahogany cradle used as a pig trough!

"I found four pine-apple beds in one afternoon, and my first sun-dial—from Surrey—and my nice Captain Pettilove set his men on the search, too, for me, and I hired an old loft and piled it up. I freighted it home and came back with it on a tramp schooner, and made friends with the captain. He told me he was going to New Orleans, where there was heaps of that old stuff, and he'd get me all I liked.

"When I got back, Ranny had gone West with a hunting party, so I settled down to getting the stuff restored, had a Fifth Avenue man value it, piece by piece, and sold it to Sue for one-tenth less than his valuations. I was frightened at what I'd made! By that time my little Captain Pettilove wrote me he had another load for me, and my big Captain Pearson shipped me about fifty-five pieces, C. O. D.—I was so excited I

couldn't sleep. Sue gave me an old shed on the new place, and I got it painted and insured and repaired, and got our old nurse to come and help me, and there I was in the antique business!

"It was as simple as *bon jour*. Nobody of my set had ever done such a thing, and they all came over to see the stuff, and I wore my stunningest clothes and patronized all the *nouveaux riches*, and gave everybody tea, and the thing simply went! You could get things all around the farms, twenty years ago, and I went about on a bicycle, asking for drinks of water, and bought the beds out from under them! When Ranny got back, I'd made fifteen hundred dollars, clear, and everybody was giving me commissions. We had another row and he forbade me to keep it up, but refused to give me any money. So I went abroad with nursie, and got some lovely things and began to advise people about them, and then took a regular contract to do that Pittsburgh—no, he was a Chicago beef packer—his house I did in pure Italian; it was one of the first.

"I worked for six months on that, and he paid me three thousand dollars—and all the Chicago women entertained me, my dear! They wore low gowns to teas, with the rooms darkened, and ate beefsteak and fried potatoes for breakfast. And they had pictures framed in plush. Then Ranny sold the house, and lost every cent on the races, and papa was furious at him, and we had it all out, once for all. I rented the little house on Gramercy Park (for a show room, really) and he paid the living expenses, and each of us was to be responsible for our own affairs. There was nothing else to do, and he had to.—And it all came from his running away and leaving me without any money!"

Lucia drew a long, excited breath. "I never heard

anything like it in my life!" she said. "Marie, you're a wonder!"

Suddenly her expression changed.

"And yet you don't understand why I want to be independent, too," she began, "you ought to be the last one, Ri-ri!"

"Understand?"

Marie's pale cheeks had each a brilliant patch of red; her hands trembled. Like all reserved natures, once unloosed, she thrilled to an excitement unknown to the babbler.

"I understand perfectly, Lutie dear; I understand—but I wonder . . ."

"Well, you wonder what?"

"I wonder," said Marie slowly, "if you appreciate the difference in our positions, my child. I was forced into my independence: I'd never have dreamed of it, without. You are deliberately planning for it."

"But if it's a good thing, Ri-ri . . ."

Mrs. Randall Fitch faced the girl squarely.

"Yes. But I'm not sure that it is!" she said.

Lucia stared. Her expression hardened slowly.

"I'm afraid I can't follow you there, Marie," she answered coldly. "I must say, I'm rather astonished."

Marie smiled sadly. After the tide of memories that had swept her off her feet, so that even now she rocked in the treacherous undertow of that flooding past, her thin, firm lips were quivering strangely.

"I know," she said simply, "I know you are, Lute. But, you see, I've tried it out, and you haven't. I—I'm older. I know too much, dear, to know as much as you do!"

"In other words," Lucia flung out, "you're married!"

"In other words—I'm married!" Marie repeated, and

her eyes dropped under Lucia's challenging glance and studied her rings blindly.

"You're foolish," Lucia insisted obstinately, "you're—you're inconsistent, Marie. Why, where in the world would you be—you, of all people—if you weren't independent?"

"I know."

Marie's voice was low and yielding, but she stared obstinately at her rings.

"Then you grudge me your own——"

"Grudge? *Grudge?* Good God!"

At the bitterness of the woman's voice something in the girl shrank and shivered.

"O Marie! O Marie!" she murmured, shaken suddenly by the empty anguish in the tones of that bright, hard voice, "how horrid it all is! And I thought you were one of the most successful women——"

"I am!"

Marie looked up, herself again.

"Successful? Of course I am. I am one of the most successful business women in New York—in the country, if you like. I didn't know we were talking about successful women."

"What are we talking about?" said Lucia wonderingly.

The lowering sun struck athwart a burnished sun-dial and flashed full on a grinning gargoyle, roosting over Marie's head, so that it seemed convulsed with ironic laughter.

"We are talking about successful wives," said M. Randall Fitch, decorator (country houses and garden fittings particularly).

"Oh!" said Lucia, "I—I see."

In the thick silence that followed, the sharp tingle of the telephone struck like an electric shock. The in-

strument was quite at the other end of the long room, and, as Marie moved toward it, Lucia spoke hurriedly, as nearly embarrassed as it was possible for Lucia to be.

"I thought it was a firm," she said hurriedly, studying the wrought iron flower holder, "I can't see why one shouldn't act like any sensible partner——"

"O Lord!"

Marie's voice dropped like a tired flag, trailed in the dust. She took up the receiver mechanically.

"Let me advise you, then," she said in her most detached manner, "in that case, my young friend, to select a partner interested in the same business. A firm, for instance (hello, hello! Yes—certainly—this is one-one-seven-three!), composed of a decorator and antique expert, and a broker who plays the races—leaves a great deal to the imagination! (Yes, yes, this is—Oh, Betty, what luck! Of course I am—Lucia's here with me. We're waiting for the one and only Max—come on up! We'll have tea here. Stop at Maillard's for some cakes, will you? All right—'bye!")

"Betty's back from those Standard Oil portraits," she explained, "they're a great success, she says. Pull out that gate-leg table, will you, Lute, and I'll start this samovar—perhaps Max would like it?"

"I don't know—he seemed set on garden stuff: these people are going up on the Hudson somewhere, to practice, and going in for pergolas and box-hedges and all that sort of thing."

"I see. Well, there's one of those couples born every minute, as the man in Weber and Fields used to say. Dear old Pete Dailey—wasn't he funny?"

The tension had broken and the studio seemed a different place already. On the rubbed, rich-colored table Marie had flung a heavy lace cloth, encrusted with won-

derful medallions of fruits and flowers; the squat samovar loomed in the middle; four exquisite, creamy cups, Greek shaped, with pale blue flowers in raised designs, came from an antique cabinet, and even as she dusted them delicately, Marie gave sharp, accustomed orders to the buttoned elevator boy.

"Ask Mr. Francesca for half a dozen of those dark red roses Mrs. Fitch gets, and a bowl of cracked ice. Speak to the tea-room girl about the muffins for four-thirty, and they are to be sent up dry—*dry*, mind, and fresh butter, separately. Tell her they're for Mrs. Randall Fitch, and they must be well browned."

With a key from her châtelaine she unlocked a carved Flemish chest, took out a wonderful iridescent old decanter with fat, glistening bosses and a siphon cased in curious metal basket work.

"He doesn't by any chance prefer Rye?" she asked, and at Lucia's prompt, "Oh—no—Scotch," nodded her head.

The dark crimson roses nodded from a tall Venetian glass laced with gold; cigarettes peeped hospitably out of a quaint little brass-bound chest; fascinating square platters of dreamy Canton blue stood waiting the cakes and muffins. The room became a charming, deep-toned setting for graceful women, an interior entirely intimate and domestic.

"You certainly know how to do it, Ri-ri!" Lucia breathed, "will you really do our house?"

"From attic to cellar, if you'll let me," Marie assured her. "I believe I can please Max down to the ground."

"I know you can."

Marie moved restlessly about, now pushing forward a worn marble column with a squinting satyr atop, now pulling into the shadow a burnished convex mirror, so

that its reflections grew mysteriously bluish and fantastic.

The samovar began bubbling cozily; a cloud of steam floated out over the heaped ice fragments in the grape-vined Sheffield bowl.

"Betty'll be here any time, now," she said. "I'll certainly be glad to see her!"

"Me, too," Lucia agreed. "Now there, Marie, there's independence for you! I suppose you haven't any doubts as to that?"

"My dear child, Betty Girard has been independent since she went to Paris. She was making six or seven thousand a year when she was twenty-three. You don't remember those drawings she did for *Life* that she signed B. Naldreth, of course, that made such a hit?"

"Of course I do. We girls pinned them in our looking-glasses at school."

"For heaven's sake! So you did. To think it was fifteen years ago!"

"Max looks just like her 'golf-man'—I was always crazy about that man . . . don't you remember, it's framed, over that low book-case in my room?"

"Well, well," Marie mused, "talk about influence! Betty probably married you, after all!"

"You don't think her independence isn't a good thing, Ri-ri?"

Lucia was light in tone, but determined. The afternoon was working in her mind, not buried.

"My dear girl, Betty's an artist. When you say that, you say everything. It wouldn't much matter, in her case, whether it was a good thing or not. It's there—it has to be. She isn't a good artist because she earns her living; she earns her living because she's a good artist.

When she was sixteen, she drew in the life-class with men and women who had studied for years; her work was first-class, it sold, she used the money, and became financially independent. You can't keep a duck from the water and you couldn't keep Betty from paint. In her case, other details have to adapt to that condition of things."

"Such details as marriage, for instance?" Lucia inquired artfully.

"Precisely. Such details as marriage."

"Aha, Mrs. Randall Fitch! Then let the same detail adapt itself to me!"

But Lucia's chuckle was not echoed. Marie probed among the tinkling bits of ice with an inlaid Spanish stiletto, silently, unresponsively.

"You girls will have to work that out," she said slowly, "there's a chance, of course. . . ."

"A chance! What chance? Sit still, children, and don't dare to move, till I look at you more!"

The door had been left ajar and Betty herself was in the room, handsome and modish and vibrant with that wonderful, heady glamour that she threw over those who loved her. Her deep voice, as warm as her eyes of rich, mocking hazel, reminded them that, when she left them last, that curious haunting *timbre* had left their ears for good till she came again; the firm grasp her full, pointed fingers left around theirs made a pale thing of other hand clasps.

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Betty took a cigarette from a tiny gold case and sat on the arm of a cane-inset Jacobean chair, swinging her high-heeled, bright-buckled shoes like a girl.

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Lucia stamped her foot with sincere vexation.

"I think you're both perfectly horrid!" she cried.

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"If I were a Dutchman, there's a chance I'd do a gorgeous *genre* bit—you two new American faces in these old European things," she said, "you're wonderful! I always forget about your hair, Lucia. *Wie geht's,* Frau Fitch? Am I late? Here are the cakes."

"Himself hasn't come," said Marie, "we're terribly

glad to see you, Betty, lamb. Were the portraits really good?"

"Corking," said Betty briefly. "The boy is the best I've done in three years. Family delighted. Walter wants me to show the boy's in London."

"Is Walter well?"

"So-so. He has an idea of going up to the country this month, but I can't possibly. But if he does, I'll close the house and stay with you, if you want me—Celestine wants me out at Hawksfield, but I couldn't very well do that."

"If I want you? I should say!"

Betty took a cigarette from a tiny gold case and sat on the arm of a cane-inset Jacobean chair, swinging her high-heeled, bright-buckled shoes like a girl.

"The children are too enormous for words," she said irrelevantly. "Cynthia wants to put her dresses down, and Naldreth is on the football team—or is it squad? He's captain of his form, now. What's this Celestine tells me about you going on a salary on the Prison business, Lutie? Have you thrown Doctor Fettauer down again?"

Lucia stamped her foot with sincere vexation.

"I think you're both perfectly horrid!" she cried.

"First Ri-ri says I oughtn't to arrange my life to suit myself, because I may have children—and in that case I can never hope to stand on my own feet; and now you, *you*, Betty Girard, who have the best brought-up children anybody knows, and run a town-house and a country place, and paint the dandiest children's portraits in this country—now *you* talk as if I must be giving up the idea of marrying, just because I want to be independent and have a job of my own!"

"Why marry, then?"

When she was sixteen, she drew in the life-class with men and women who had studied for years; her work was first-class, it sold, she used the money, and became financially independent. You can't keep a duck from the water and you couldn't keep Betty from paint. In her case, other details have to adapt to that condition of things."

"Such details as marriage, for instance?" Lucia inquired artfully.

"Precisely. Such details as marriage."

"Aha, Mrs. Randall Fitch! Then let the same detail adapt itself to me!"

But Lucia's chuckle was not echoed. Marie probed among the tinkling bits of ice with an inlaid Spanish stiletto, silently, unresponsively.

"You girls will have to work that out," she said slowly, "there's a chance, of course. . . ."

"A chance! What chance? Sit still, children, and don't dare to move, till I look at you more!"

The door had been left ajar and Betty herself was in the room, handsome and modish and vibrant with that wonderful, heady glamour that she threw over those who loved her. Her deep voice, as warm as her eyes of rich, mocking hazel, reminded them that, when she left them last, that curious haunting *timbre* had left their ears for good till she came again; the firm grasp her full, pointed fingers left around theirs made a pale thing of other hand clasps.

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"Why marry, then?"

Betty puffed a cloud of smoke into the steam of the samovar.

"Why? Why? Why did you?"

"I had my job years before I married," said Mrs. Girard, briefly.

"All very well, but Marie didn't."

"I was forced into mine," said Marie quickly, "and I had been married years before."

"For the love of Mike!"

Lucia rose to her feet and stormed at them, her eyes big and gray, her cheeks a sudden crimson.

"This is a little too much, you two!" she fumed. "Betty is all right, of course, because she earned her own money long before she married, and Ri-ri's all right, of course, because she began earning hers long after! But I mustn't begin, *when* I marry!—You're a couple of donkeys."

Miss Stanchon subsided after this elegant address, and gulped.

"It would be interesting to know what Walter Girard and Ranny Fitch think on this subject," she added maliciously. She looked frankly at the two older women, but they looked away from each other and her.

CHAPTER XI

The Doctors Disagree

"YOU'RE too shrinking, Lucia," said Max Fettauer, bowing, with a touch of foreign courtesy, to the women, from his place in the open door. "You are so shy, I'm afraid you'll never be able to be heard! Express yourself, my dear—get into the movement!"

Lucia giggled. This slim, dark fiancé of hers was almost the only person who could embarrass her: his cool brown eyes had the secret of certain glances that lowered her own.

"You'll get into the muffins, Max, unless you come in," she suggested brusquely. "I couldn't help making a noise—neither Betty nor Marie seems very keen on my taking the secretaryship.—No, put them on this blue plate, boy—take yours out."

"The blue plate, by all means," Fettauer agreed gravely, closing the door behind the boy, "although the table is too beautiful to disturb. But I've had no lunch, and those muffins . . . can you make them, Lucia?"

This time she faced the twinkle in his eye.

"No, Doctor Fettauer, I can't. Neither can I spin, nor make candles, nor soap, nor your shirts, nor doughnuts, nor pumpkin-pie, nor patchwork quilts."

"Nor *lieb-kücken?*" he inquired anxiously, *"nor kaffee-brod?"*

"No German messes whatever. And I can't under-

stand the hideous language, either. But I *can* organize prison-reform—and, by George, *I'm going to!*"

"Of course you are. Have some tea," said Max placidly, "and butter me a muffin, will you? I know you placed those roses, Mrs. Fitch? I hope you picked me out the best possible wedding-present for this class-mate of mine? I'm depending on you, you know."

"If that isn't just like you, Max," his betrothed murmured resentfully, simmering down by rapid stages, "as a matter of fact, Marie, his mind is set like a steel trap, and we're to all of us agree with him about his darned present, before he gets it, that's all!"

They laughed indulgently and the rich, soothing aroma of the steeping tea mingled pleasantly with the roses.

Lutie buttered muffins meekly; this dark, broad-shouldered doctor of hers, though younger by several years than her friends, seemed, unlike the Americans of his age, more their equal than hers. She seemed to sit in a ring of experience, a circle of silent, indulgent teachers, waiting to initiate her among them, hopeful, well wishing, but less secure of the future, withal, than she.

Meditating, she savored the chocolate-coated cakes, plunging into their almond-scented hearts with the delighted greed of a healthy child.

Later, when the sun was really red, and Max, a tiny gold-chased glass of Scotch in one hand, a long Russian cigarette in the other, strolled with Betty Girard to the far end of the long studio, earnest in a discussion of the new German symbolism, Marie, filling her cup for the final intimate drops, went on as if there had been no interruption, and Lucia listened as if they had been alone.

"You see, it was so wonderful for Betty, marrying Walter," she said softly, "all his interest was in art,

really. I doubt if he would have made much as a lawyer, if Peter Forsythe and those other 'Bones' men hadn't thrown that big estate in his way, and it just happened to suit him. His room at Yale was full of the loveliest prints and Japanese things, Peter told me, and he really went without food almost, clothes, certainly, to buy the pictures he wanted. He's followed her work so steadily, and went abroad twice with her. He used to draw awfully well, Peter says, he almost went into it himself."

"That's what I mean by a 'firm,'" said Lucia gravely, and the other sighed.

"Firm? What firm?" Betty had the ears of a deer.

"Marriage," said Lucia.

Her eyes sought her man's appealingly. "If a man and his wife aren't a firm, what are they?" said she, "why can't they be partners and play fair? Isn't that why business succeeds?"

"Naturally," Marie agreed, "and of course they can, Lutie, if they will."

Max looked at Betty Girard; her olive cheeks glowed out of her dark hair. She had lifted a rose from the Venetian glass and held it against her strong chin.

"How about it, Mrs. Betty?" he asked quietly.

"It sounds all right," she answered, and her voice, suddenly, was listless, "why not?"

"It *is* all right!" said Lucia, "we'll show you!"

Betty flicked the rose like a riding whip in her hand. She looked over their heads.

"You may perhaps be able to show us—since you have selected a partner who is not interested in your particular business!" she said lightly. "That is the principal requisite for the marriage-firm!"

Lucia gasped, scowled, then burst into a hysterical

laugh. She turned accusing eyes on Marie, who persistently refused to meet them.

"You hear that, Mrs. Randall Fitch? You hear that?" she demanded excitedly, "and you just told me that *unless* we had the same interests . . . see here, Max, this is no game for Lucia Theodora Stanchon! You'd better marry a doctor lady, like your friend. I may be very young and inexperienced (Oh yes, I know what you're all thinking!) but I'll be hanged if I——"

The great Colonial knocker clanged impatiently, and the buttoned elevator boy flung open the door.

"Yes, ma'am, sure they're in, this is two hundred and two—sure!"

A slim, spectacled man advanced to them, a hand stretched out to Max.

"Here we are, Fettauer! Just a moment on our way to the train—we're going out to the Place!"

"Why, Ridge, this is luck! And Doctor Harris, too—come in, Doctor Harris!"

Max led in to them a neat, tailored, young woman, fresh cheeked, strongly poised on her square-toed boots.

"This is my friend Doctor Ridgeway, Mrs. Randall Fitch—I asked them to have a look at the garden bench and see if it suited. Lucia, you remember Ridge? Doctor Harris, Mrs. Girard. . . ."

"I'm afraid we're interrupting, Will," and the fresh cheeks deepened slightly, though the keen, straight glance held level. "I've long wanted to meet you, Miss Stanchon."

"Not a bit of it, doctor. You're in time, just, to help us out!"

Max Fettauer smiled a subtle little smile; Lucia never understood that little smile.

"Tell us, Ridge," he said easily, "you're on the edge

of the very experiment we were discussing. If any two people in this world should be able to judge of marriage as a—what was it, Lucia?"

"Marriage," said Doctor Ridgeway succinctly, "in our case, at least, is equivalent to the founding of a firm—a firm."

They gasped. Fettauer bowed politely to the three women.

"Then, of course," he said gravely, "although Mrs. Fitch (I gather) believes that community of interest is necessary, and Mrs. Girard considers the absence of it imperative, you and Doctor Harris are quite convinced that an identical occupation is the only safe rule!"

Doctor Ridgeway wiped his glasses judicially.

"Strangely enough, no," he said, in his harsh, didactic voice, "quite the contrary, in fact. I cannot imagine a more dangerous experiment, ordinarily speaking, or one more likely to result in marital——"

"But, heavens above!" Lucia cried, "look at *you!* What do you mean?"

The hand that held the didactic glasses slipped unconsciously to the tailored shoulder near it. The harsh voice softened. A slow smile crept under the stiff mustache.

"It's—it's different with us!" he said gently. "Really! I—I . . . as a matter of fact, it's quite different!"

Marie laughed shortly and a wry smile twisted Betty's handsome mouth; their lashes fluttered quickly.

But Max Fettauer laughed out honestly and faced Lucia's doubtful eyes to his.

"Of course it's different!" he cried, *"it always is!* Don't you see, dearest girl, don't you see? Never mind what they think—good God, never mind what *we* think! How do we know—it's you and I!"

TO-DAY'S DAUGHTER

She caught his smile and warmed to it.

"If you think it's a firm, all right! We'll try it out," said he, and took her hand . . . the future stretched before them, beckoning.

CHAPTER XII

Consultations

"WOULD you mind telling me, Mattie," the doctor interrupted gently, "before we go on any further—is this a consultation, or a lecture on the suffrage? Because it makes a difference—to me."

"But if I am paying for your time," she began obstinately.

"You're not," he shot at her, "not by a long chalk. And anyhow, my dear child, if you were, neither you nor Peter has money enough to hire me to undergo the unspeakable boredom of that cave-man lecture. I wish, for heaven's sake, you'd all of you drop it. Do you know, my dear Mattie, it's got so that whenever I hear the word *bow-and-arrow,* or *candles,* or *soap,* or *spinning,* I always think of votes?"

"Votes . . . for women?" she suggested unpityingly.

"Why, of course! Whoever thinks of any other kind of votes? We don't get the chance."

"Then that's a very good thing," she declared, with the warm, quick smile that never failed to draw its answering gleam from under his bushy eyebrows. But he shook his head a little wearily.

"I don't know, my dear, I don't know. As I tell Lutie, when she makes me go over her proofs (Lutie'll learn punctuation, I trust, when she gets the vote), I never seem to be able to keep awake till I come to those new arguments she tells about—I get so sleepy over

that cave-man. He's a perfect opiate, as far as I'm concerned. I never could understand why so many of my suffragist patients need trional!"

"Doctor Stanchon, you're a pig! And when you know perfectly well that I really *did* come—and heaven knows I've no time—to ask you if there *was* any acetylene, or whatever it is, in those tablets that Ridgefield woman told me about, if you don't care to answer, very well. Because I'm as strong as a horse, and it's so simply silly when my head feels so, just when I have to speak. . . ."

"One moment," he interrupted patiently, for he was enormously fond of little Mattie (she was one of those solid, muscular, handsome women whom men call little, because they love them) "one moment, my child. Men put acetylene into their motor-cars so that they can see where they're going and not kill themselves: women put acetanilid into their systems with precisely the opposite results."

"Oh!" she murmured.

She looked vaguely about the big, book-lined room, familiar to her from her girlhood. Heavy leather curtains hung against the folding doors that shut off this intimate library from the official consulting-room and the more formal waiting-room. The great, tawny skins on the polished floor, the busts in dim, upper niches, the branching antlers above the patient, empty elk-eyes (witnesses to many a vacation hunt) none of these suggested the doctor's office. But Martha had often looked at those tooled leather backs, glinting with gold from the afternoon sun, those deep, comfortable chairs with the strong arms so many tense hands had gripped in so many silent crises, those mellow, restful engravings of cool-arched cathedrals; looked curiously at them, and wondered what storms and terrors, what reliefs and

despairs they had witnessed—and never betrayed! For if the room behind the doors was a laboratory, this was a very crucible.

"As for your head," he turned away his own, and reached tentatively for an unfinished letter, "you surely can't expect me, Martha, to take the time that really belongs to others and explain again to you the necessity for supplying fresh blood to a slightly anemic brain, for relaxing the nerves whose business it is to——"

"Oh, no, I remember," she broke in humbly (for he always frightened her when he called her Martha) "only, it's not so bad, now, and I only meant that it seems so maddening to have Betty Girard do all she does *with* those dreadful headaches, and she says you're stopping them now, anyway. And I got a case of vichy, too——"

"Sometimes, Martha, I think I've been mistaken all along, and that you *are* a fool," he interrupted, and whirled at her. "What has vichy to do with it? Mrs. Girard has a congested liver: she's a woman of undoubted brain capacity, and she preferred to follow my régime, here, rather than get the same results at an expensive German *Kur*. I knew she had the strength of mind for it, and I knew you hadn't, that's all. And there's nothing whatever the matter with your liver. Betty Girard's headaches have no more connection with yours than her husband's business has with Peter's. I suppose you're taking the baths I ordered her?"

"A great many people take Turkish baths without consulting *you*," she said sulkily, "and I'm determined not to leave a stone unturned. . . ."

"There's one stone that is quite usually left unturned for a long time—until a railroad comes through the

cemetery," he said grimly. "I'll speak with Peter. I really can't talk with you any longer, Martha. You're quite beyond reason. I have a great deal to do—if you'll excuse me."

"Yes—correcting Lucia's proofs!" she cried impishly, but she rose. "I won't take the tablets, truly, nor the baths, either, if you don't like. But why do you help Lucia with the cave-man lectures, you cross thing, if it makes you sleepy?"

He smiled at her.

"Lutie's my daughter, Mattie, and—that's why," he answered gently. "When your Martha is big enough to be spanked without hurting her and too big to be spanked without insulting her, you'll see how it is!"

Softened, she wrapped him for a moment in one of her rich smiles, where her eyes seemed to melt into yours and your eyes (if you were a man) smarted and stung when she took hers away. His hands rested listlessly above the busy desk: he shook his head as the throb of her motor announced her gone.

"All the same, she's wrong!" he muttered to his wife's photograph, "she's wrong, and poor Peter's going to pay for it!"

That evening, as with a doctor's easy apology he came in after the soup and shook hands with a delighted hostess, bowing and smiling around a table where all were friends and most were patients, he stared for a second, almost off his guard at the smile that met his, timidly, behind the place card where *Mrs. Peter Williston Forsythe* lied blandly in his face from a white, gilt-edged place card.

"I'm—I'm Mary Gillatt—you remember, the governess?" she said, gathering courage under his kind eye, "when little Naldreth had bronchitis, you know?"

"Perfectly. And I'm charmed to meet Miss Gillatt again."

"Mrs. Forsythe had one of her terrible headaches at the last minute—it *is* too bad about them, isn't it?—and so I filled in. I'm sorry—but I'm having *such* a good time!"

She apologized so naïvely for her presence, her color was so clear and sweet under the troubled gray eyes, that he had great difficulty not to pat her smooth young shoulder.

"At it again, doctor, isn't she?" the man on her left murmured behind her. "I can't persuade Miss Gillatt that I'd a heap sight rather talk to her about Doherty's up-to-the-net work than pure milk stations for the Russian Jews!"

"How dreadful of you!" she cried softly. "Doctor Stanchon, tell him he mustn't make fun of Mrs. Forsythe, won't you?"

"I'm not making fun," the tennis enthusiast insisted stoutly, "only I do say that when a man's worked hard all day at the office, he wants to hear something besides politics and city improvements at dinner—and, by George, that's all I hear nowadays! I think they're all crazy. Mrs. Girard here (he nodded at their amazingly decolletée hostess) is all tuberculosis now, and, honestly, it takes my appetite away, when I'm dining."

"Oh!" she shook her head sadly at him, "how *can* you? Why, last week, fifteen children from the Tuberculosis Parent Associa——"

"There, there, Miss Gillatt! That'll do!" he interrupted placidly. "I'm going to talk about Mary Garden, or Mr. Morgan, or some snappy, cheerful topic like that! No tuberculosis in mine, thanks!"

Doctor Stanchon left them wrangling contentedly,

caught the echoes of a lecture on Schedule K from a high shouldered dowager on his right, and attacked a complicated entrée in silence.

Alone with the men, later, he strolled into the leather-hung billiard room and drifted casually toward Peter.

"How's Mattie?" he asked carelessly, puffing at a dying cigar.

"Pretty bad, I'm afraid, this time, doctor. They're rubbing her head and the governess keeps boiling cloths on her eye—is that all right? Oughtn't she to see an oculist, Stanchon?"

"I don't know what for," the older man replied shortly. "We've been all over that. Her eyes are as strong as a lynx's. I've told you a dozen times, Peter. . . ."

"I know." Peter sat down hard on a great divan under the leaded Dutch window. "But, for God's sake, Stanchon, what can I do?"

The doctor puffed slowly, silently.

"I've begged her, I've bribed her, I said I'd quit and go abroad—and you know how I hate Europe! Europe's all right for women, you know," quoth Peter thoughtfully, wagging his sleek blond head, "but I'm hanged if I see how a man stands it long!"

Still the doctor puffed.

"Then you must admit that sanitarium game was pretty foolish, Stanchon! It's perfectly true she gained three pounds—but look how furious *that* made her! She went on skim-milk and vichy and lost five, the next week. And then they had that loony Congress of Welfare Workers—I tell you, doctor, it's enough to drive a man to drink!"

The doctor inhaled a deep lungful of Walter Girard's extraordinary cigar (a thing no doctor should do) but made no other sign.

CONSULTATIONS

"Can I put her in handcuffs?" Peter queried angrily, chewing his six-inch cigarette; "can I forbid her to chase around after those damn shopgirls? It's perfectly true that she has leisure—I don't want a drudge for a wife, I hope—and, of course, as she says, it isn't as if she lived in a cave and had everything to do——"

"There! That's my limit!" the deep, bass Stanchon shout echoed through the smoke, and the men raised their heads with inquiring smiles, so that he lowered his voice.

"When I get to the cave stage in these affairs," he stated definitely, "I draw the line. Look here, Peter, did you ever live in a cave?"

Peter stared.

"Not since I was nine and a half," he said gruffly, "what of it?"

Doctor Stanchon selected another cigar from a watchful butler, clipped the end with a curious scarab-set affair that had no equal in the world, his patients whispered, being the gift of one who gave so much more royally than royalty as to make his name a proverb—and, with his delicate surgeon's gestures, lighted it.

"Look here, Peter," he said quietly, "there's only one way to thrash this cave business out. As I figure it, the reason most of my patients are sick to-day is because the cave women had no leisure. My patients have, and, as nature, being female, abhors a vacuum, they have immediately filled in their leisure so effectually that it's hard to say just where they score. The cave woman had backaches and they have headaches. I never had either, so I can't say which wins out there. But I've never been so sure that the cave woman *hadn't* any leisure, myself. For all we know, she got so bored after she had the Missing Link trained in as butler, and a

good sensible chimpanzee with unexceptionable references packed off with the cave children, that she got up welfare work among the outlying and less fortunate monkeys!"

"What d'ye mean?" said Peter sturdily.

"I mean, why don't you find out? If she *did* have leisure, then what's all the row about? Of course," he added gravely, "this is all, as you perceive, symbolic, Peter."

"I don't know what the devil you're driving at," said Peter gloomily; "you know I'm not so clever as Mattie, doctor, and that's why I don't feel that I have any right——"

"Bosh!" boomed the doctor, all bass again, "you're quite as clever, and infinitely more sensible. You've heard so many women say that, you know, that you've come to believe in it. Weak, Peter, very weak! Go and lease a cave."

"But—but, hang it all, Stanchon, Mattie couldn't live in a cave! What d'ye mean, really?"

"Nonsense. Anybody can live in a cave. Kings have done it. Castaways are grateful for the chance. Nature lovers are always howling about it. Hire a cave, Peter!"

"But she wouldn't stay in it!"

"Get one she'd *have* to stay in. Think it out. Certainly, Walter, with pleasure," and Doctor Stanchon followed his host to the music room.

But Peter sat, tranced and wondering, on the leather couch under the leaded Dutch window, and the butler, sympathetic and adequate, brought him his coat, called him a taxi, and sent him home quietly, with never a glimpse of the Neapolitan singer who came in later to entertain the dinner party.

CHAPTER XIII

The Cave Man

IT seemed to Martha—all raw nerves after a racking forty-eight hours' torture, that he was unusually absent, as he read by the wicker couch in her upstairs sitting room; unusually apologetic later over his early fishing trip.

"But, heavens, Peter, you needn't explain it so much!" she said fretfully, "go to the Adirondacks, of course; why not? you need the change. Anybody would suppose you were going with a chorus lady!"

He grinned guiltily.

"Not so bad as all that, Mat," he soothed. "Only, it seems mean to go off like this while you're still under the weather. That's all."

She shook her head perversely. "Nonsense! I'll be practically all right to-morrow. It's not as if I were sick, really, you know. I'm all right—till the next time."

"Um," he grunted, then, after a moment, "the kiddies all right? They don't catch cold easily, do they, or anything like that?"

"The baby does. Peep never had one in his life, I believe. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. And rain doesn't hurt, anyhow."

"What *do* you mean, Peter? Who has to go out in the rain? Now, don't plan any expedition, please, dear, because this Fräulein detests wet, and I can't make another change."

"No, no—I was thinking of—of me," he said clumsily. "Who took that catalogue out of my room, do you know?"

"Catalogue?" Mattie scowled wearily, "oh, not that camping outfit one? Peep got at it, Fräulein said, and tore the pictures out to paste. It was very meddling of him. I told her it didn't matter, because all you'd need was in the motor-basket. You're not buying more?"

"A few things," he said vaguely. "You wouldn't feel like coming along, Mat? Like you used to? We could take Peep."

"Oh, Peter, don't be absurd! How could I?"

"We-ell," he drawled, eying her, "Aunt Jess could come over and manage—she'd love it."

"I suppose Aunt Jess could manage those, too?"

She waved her hand to the accusing green calendar on her desk; it bristled with appointments in her square, clear handwriting.

"When you were so set against my taking the presidency I warned you that the secretaryship of the executive committee would mean harder work.

"And now, Lucia, though she's chairman, of course, is only going to give three days a week, and when she's in the office, she takes every bit of Miss Ferris' time. Honestly," Mattie soliloquized, aggrieved, "you'd think Ferris was Lute's personal stenographer! And, of course, Lutie thinks that being engaged makes no difference and all that, but, just the same, it does.

"Not that anybody kicks, of course," she added quickly, "we've all been engaged, for the matter of that!"

He caught her eyes and held them.

"Yes, we've all been engaged," he repeated, and Mattie grew rosy as a girl and relinquished the hand he demanded.

"Don't be foolish, dear—my hair's just been waved!"

Peter's nearest approach to a frown shadowed his forehead, but his wife went on hastily, relieving her mind, evidently, of much accumulated material.

"I don't know what you'd have done, Peter Forsythe, if you'd married Lucia!"

"I shouldn't," he answered promptly.

"Pooh! And she wouldn't either, you're too old for Lutie. She likes 'em young. But, really, Peter, just look at Max Fettauer: three days a week, right out, and he's perfectly willing!"

"Is he?"

"Anyway, he *says* so."

"He hasn't tried it out yet, Mat. Give 'em time."

"Oh, Peter, you're absurd! He knows well enough what he's in for."

"I wonder," said Peter thoughtfully.

"Well, anyway, I never asked for anything like that, Peter. Now, did I? All I'm saying is the presidency was mostly speaking, and I should have had my own secretary. As it is, I have to share with the ways-and-means, and their correspondence is terrible. I don't see how I can get away from town before the middle of May, now—if I can then. I'll send the children off this month and go down for week-ends with you, I think."

Peter got up abruptly and left the room, the only discourtesy he permitted himself with Mattie. But all the next day his patient stenographer marveled at the ways of man.

The spring had come on early, and its languors and reactions edged the tempers of executive commitees and set chairmen by the ears. Professional auditors submitted disquieting, if convincing, reports, and vague

plans for a monster benefit performance loomed before the harassed workers.

"Oh, dear, Peter," a weary Mattie reasoned, "don't be so tiresome! Please! It's not money—it hasn't anything to do with money, I tell you! There's plenty of money in New York—plenty. We can get all the money we want for everything. Everybody knows that. It's the time—the *time!*"

Something in the curious, speculative glance he shot at her alarmed her. Was it possible? Was Peter really criticizing her, Mattie? Was he really measuring, weighing? . . .

That night in the motor she turned to him casually.

"We could go up to the lake with you, if you liked, the children and I," she said. "Peep is crazy to go, Fräulein says, and we could do it and back in five days, couldn't we?"

"Five and a half," he answered thoughtfully, "ye-es, that would be very nice. I—I couldn't take Fräulein, though, this trip, Mattie. I'm taking lots more stuff this time: Dicky and I thought we'd go farther back than we've been, and rely pretty much on ourselves. I've figured out the number of pounds pretty thoroughly, and I can just about get the kids in."

Her lips opened to say, "Very well, then, don't bother —I shouldn't dream of going without Fräulein," but when the words came (was it pique at his attitude? she never knew) lo, she was replying, "Then I suppose we must manage without her, that's all!"

A month later, exhausted from a racking headache following a stormy board meeting, she climbed into the seat beside him with a sense of positive relief.

"Where's Stetson?" she asked, "won't he sit with the children?"

"Oh, he'll come on by train and take the car back," Peter assured her easily, "no use lugging *his* weight. And, honestly, Mattie, if a thirteen-year-old boy and an eleven-year-old girl can't sit in a loaded tonneau without falling out, it's time they learned how!"

She sank back, acquiescent, and wrapped in the bliss that follows vanished aching, noticed with a faint amusement the strangely fussy farewells of the abandoned Fraülein.

"Anybody'd think we were going for the summer!" she said.

"Yes," said Peter, and the air streamed swiftly by them.

Mattie was always vague as to locality, and Peter's known interest in new routes was the jest of all his friends. *Alaska via New Orleans* was said to be his motto, and so, though the waits for gasoline punctuated unfamiliar stretches, though the hotels grew unrecognizable and the chambermaids steadily less capable and more kindly, though spring seemed less and less a promise and more and more a fact accomplished, it was only at the end of the third day that Mattie, who never looked at a map, glanced carelessly at Peter's crossroad quandary and gasped at the State through which she was traveling.

"Ohio!" she cried, "why, Peter Forsythe, how can we get to the Adirondacks through Ohio? What's that map?"

Peter smiled through his roofed goggles "Adirondacks?" he queried, "did you think we were going to the Lake? I thought I told you, Mat. Dicky and I are going to try Kentucky this time. Didn't you know? Now, where on earth *is* that darned road—it looks like a cart track, he said, but he made it, all right. Then,

that's as far as I'm sure. But we can ask the rest of the way. It's right over the State line, I think."

"But, Peter, don't you *know?* What a crazy idea! How will Dicky Varnham meet you? How can Stetson get to us, to take me back? What's the name of the place? It's just like two impractical men!"

Peter lit a cigarette. "Oh, I don't know," he said, "I'm pretty practical, all right, Mat. Dicky's the one that knows the way, really, better than I. It's near Job's Hollow, or Toby's Hollow, or something like that. We'll have to poke along and ask the natives after the next fifty miles or so. You don't care, do you, dear?"

Her heart softened. She always grew very fond of Peter on these trips through the open, and the worries of her complicated little life insensibly smoothed away with the tired, solid sleep, the early morning starts, when they seemed the only living souls under the blue sky, the lazy, long luncheons while they rested by the road, with hot soup and sandwiches and what the children called "motoring desserts."

"Why, no," she said, "I don't mind, dear, except that I must be back by Tuesday, surely. The final allotment of sub-committees for the Benefit is to be all settled then, you know. So long as you understand that——"

"Oh, I understand," he interrupted shortly, and, throwing away his cigarette, he began to test the tires.

A little wrinkle leaped between her brows. "If daddy could only understand that I must keep promises when I make them!" she complained to Peep.

"Well, you promised to go with him, didn't you?" suggested Peter's blonde and solid replica, "I want to stay. Can't I, mother? I love to eat in the road. I like it better than Switzerland."

"I don't—I love abroad. Everybody calls me *Made-*

moiselle abroad," piped the baby, "did you know we all have our bathing suits, Muddy? He told Fräulein to put them."

"Don't say 'he'—say 'father,'" Mattie corrected mechanically, "I suppose Kentucky *is* warmer, but we sha'n't have any time for bathing, children, I must be back on Tuesday."

Peter, under the car, cleared his throat.

When even the power of sixty horses had reached its limit in the faint sandy road, they anchored the useless motor under a providential shed and hired, of a non-committal poor white, a rattle-trap buckboard and a weather-worn mule. Standing idle among the wondering, tow-headed progeny of a silent woman whose patient, lackluster eyes seemed older than the pyramids, Mattie watched with a real interest Peter's quick, efficient gestures as he loaded the ramshackle cart, and listened vaguely to his curt directions as to ditching around the shed-garage, otherwise, for a wonder, watertight, in case of heavy rain.

Then, filing slowly along the rough road, they started out, the baby throned on the waterproofed bundles, Peep proudly leading the mule, the grown-ups, one on either side.

"I love you in these kind of clothes, Muddy," quoth Peep suddenly, and——"

"So do I," said Peter briefly.

Mattie swung her short tramping skirt high above her stout, blunt-nosed fishing boots and drove her hands into her deep hip pockets.

"Although I can't see the point, for just this little way, Peter," she added, "did you know we'd have to walk? Do you think Dicky'll be there—when we get there?"

"Can't say," and Peter hit the horse a smart cut.

Afterward Martha remembered that walk as an interminable nightmare that cut them off from the habitable world. Long after she had mutinied; long after Peter had patiently explained that to go back would be harder, to wait for Dicky impracticable; long after she had mounted the buckboard beside the baby; long after Peep had capitulated and joined her; long after they had all three fallen fast asleep, did that dreamlike journey endure, Peter tramping tirelessly by the tireless mule, while morning wore to noon and noon wore to mid-afternoon, and the shadows turned. They saw no one, they heard nothing. Cowbells had long ceased. Fringeing woods had melted insensibly into thickening forest, and when the mule stopped with a bump and the three dozers woke, stiff but indubitably refreshed, the last faint wood-track had vanished and they stood, awed, lost in the silence of the mountains.

A sense of something impending, something that would be different soon, grew curiously strong in Martha. This man, strong and supple in his leatherbound khaki, taciturn under the stained sombrero, this tireless, steady guide whose eyes never, somehow, met hers, was he her husband? Her Peter, that she "wound around her finger"? No one could be afraid with him, he would never do anything weak or stupid in these woods he loved so . . . but would he do as she wished?

"We'll have to pack it from here," he said shortly. "I'm afraid of the rain unless we hurry, Mat. Rested?"

"Oh, yes," she assured him quickly, "but how if it gets us, dear? My suit's waterproof—this cloth will hold a gallon of water in my lap, you know—but the children——"

"They'll be all right," he interrupted, "I've got ponchos for them. Here, Peep, give me a hand with this," and

before the eyes of the delighted youngsters he unrolled two small but bulging *rück-säcke* and fitted them deftly to each slender pair of shoulders. "And here are your raincoats," he concluded, slipping over their beaming faces the round hole of the light rubber cape. "Will you take this, dear? It's only fifteen pounds."

She stood as still as the children, while he adjusted the shoulder straps of her load, a small guide's pack in basket form, and laid his own, twice its size, near by. With practiced haste he unhitched the wagon, laid army blankets across the strong mule, bound a waterproof bundle on either side, and lifted the ecstatic baby onto the middle.

"Can you hang on, Sister?" he queried briefly, and her proud assurances bridged the interval wherein he pushed the old wagon behind the underbrush and heaved his pack upon his back.

"Come on, then," he said; "you go ahead, Peep, and see if you can find the trail, the way I taught you last year."

"Oh, look—it's as fresh as anything, this blaze!" cried Peep triumphantly, and Mattie's sudden doubt and fear subsided at Peter's easy reply:

"Why, of course. Mr. Varnham went all over this, this winter."

"Oh! Then you *do* know where we're going, Peter!" she ventured. "I suppose you realize that, if I had had any idea we were to be dragged on such a wild-goose chase, I should never have dreamed for a moment of coming?"

"I suppose I do," he answered her, and again that curious sense of an impending change came over her.

The trail grew faint, fainter, then disappeared. Peter consulted the back of an old envelope, scowled, medi-

tated deeply, and at length led them backward and around a landmark of an oak whose great roots wrapped a lichened boulder.

"Here we are!" he cried, "now it's only a mile or so, I think."

The mule picked his patient way over trees, fallen and fragrant in decay; along the bed of a tiny stream; through thickets that needed Peter's woodsman's axe. Martha's lips, tight-pressed, uttered no word. The affair was too absurd. And yet there seemed to be no point in argument: somewhere, now, they must camp for the night, and she could not wrangle before the children. Visions of the comfortable camps of the Adirondacks, the full kitchen, the clean beds, the wood chopped and ready, cheered her, and there was, at worst, the satisfaction of proving equal, physically, to this unexpected demand upon her strength. Not every woman could have done it.

A great swish of wind, the rush of the leaves, and the first sharp spat of rain—and then Peter's voice.

"Here it is! Just in time, Peep! Now you can rest, dear, and let it rain all it wants to!"

She stopped, bewildered, and stared about her.

"Oh! Oh! *Muddy!*" Peep's voice fairly broke with joy, "a cave! A cave in the rocks! See!"

Only the great scudding drops forced her to run after Peter and grope into the opening in the solid cliff before her. Then she stared about her.

CHAPTER XIV

The Cave Woman

SHE stood in an arched room of stone that might have been five yards in diameter—for it was rudely circular. Against one wall a raised hearth of charred stones and a blackened streak that followed the wall into obscurity indicated that some natural draught had been utilized. Even Peter's six feet three could stand clear in the center, and the rough beds of leaves in two further corners had plenty of head space. Near the fireplace a crude table of peeled logs and several stumps of the general height of stools furnished this retreat, and a rusty skillet, an iron pot and a candle stuck into a whiskey bottle showed that the den had sheltered human life before now.

"Just as Varnham said!"

Peter's voice was as blandly congratulatory as if some royal suite in some Ritz-Carlton had, after much diplomacy, been secured—and, indeed, it was no less to the enraptured children. Mattie stared, dazed.

"You mean this is the camp? Here? Are we going to sleep *here?*" she gasped.

"Surest thing you know," said Peter cheerfully. "Hi! there she comes!" and the rain broke in torrents outside.

She sank in a sort of stupor on one of the least uncomfortable stumps and watched, as from a seat in the parquet, the bustle about and around her.

The opening in the cave was nearly as high as an ordinary door and quite twice as broad, so that a fairly good light poured in, and an overhang of irregular rocky formation kept off all but the most daring of the rain-scuds. The shadowy corner behind the entrance proved to be stacked with logs and dried fagots, and of these Peter constructed skilfully a roaring blaze. Running his hands through the heaped leaves in the corner he announced with satisfaction:

"Good! These leaves are fresh and sweet yet—Dicky must have got 'em from hollows and behind rocks," he explained to the eager Peep. "See these nice pine boughs underneath? Best bed in the world. Unstrap the blankets, son—but here, let's have a sweep-out, first."

In an unbelievably short time he had bound small spray-wood about a branch and Peep was scattering water unskilfully from his father's sombrero before the onslaughts of this rough-and-ready broom. The floor was hard trodden clay, as solid as asphalt, and Mattie marveled at the dexterity with which her son caught the litter in an old newspaper and emptied it into the blaze.

Like a woman in a dream she watched Peter unroll the tight parcels, spread heavy blankets on the beds, a pair of sheets on one, army blankets again, and atop of the sheeted one a small air pillow.

"That's for mother," he explained, between great puffs, "but you and I don't need one on ours."

"No, indeed!" Peep agreed proudly, puttering among the packs, where Sister bustled contentedly, under foot and persistently housewifely.

"The motor-trunk!" Mattie cried suddenly, "I believe it's in the car! And my cold cream is in it! And my—and everything!"

"Not a bit," he beamed on her, "don't you believe it! I knew we couldn't pack the beastly thing, so Fräulein put me up this hold-all . . ."

She fell on it and scowled at the wonder of its contents—a laboratory of efficient selection and squeezing.

"But it's my crinkly things, that don't iron!" she burst out, "good heavens, does the woman think I'm to be here all summer! What are the sneakers for? Did she suppose *I* was in this camping scheme?"

By now the tin cups and plates filled the table; a forked stick cleverly propped between stones leaned crane-wise over the lowered fire; bacon, condensed milk, eggs, and coffee grouped themselves as by miracle about the cook, and Peep, blissful almost beyond bearing, scrubbed the great iron pot with ashes and hot water, collected by hatfuls in perilous dashes from a nearby rook-pool.

"There's a spring a few yards off, according to Varnham," said Peter, "I'll be back in a moment," and he was gone with his own great collapsible camp bucket.

Mattie pottered mechanically among the stores and found herself ranging them along the handy ledges of her rocky pantry. The dry warmth of the fire soothed her, the neat toilet-roll and warm blanket-wrapper assuaged her rising temper, and it could not be denied that the children were amusing to watch.

Peter and his son fell upon the sack of potatoes that had ballasted the mule and Peep was entrusted, it being still light and the rain nearly over, with the fascinating responsibility of carrying the peelings to that inscrutable animal, who was stabled, nearly as dry as his masters, in a tiny shack of boughs and unbarked logs near the spring.

Then, as wide shafts of red lights struck down the green aisles and a fragrant fresh incense rose from the watered earth, they dragged the great waterproof blanket up to the roof of the cave, and, wrapped in woolen jackets, warmed with Peter's unapproachable coffee, appeased with Peter's inimitable potatoes fried in bacon fat, and great squares of wood-toasted bread, dallying with the luxury of scrambled eggs and dried beef, they sank against each other in blissful fatigue.

Mattie, by great luck, had filled her largest cigarette case, a double-decked, gold-covered affair of one Vickery's blessed invention; and as she defied Doctor Stanchon in a deep-drawn lungful, she became conscious of a sudden, gently rising tide of happiness—unreasoning, physical happiness. It grew and grew, and she watched it eagerly, as we watch a blown bubble and wait for the airy crash. But it did not crash. And this because it was not a bubble at all, but a soft, slipping, loosening tension, that smoothed and eased everything and dispelled the whole worn worry of the winter, so that she floated up, as it were, up, up, to the surface of herself, and rested lightly there. Something called *Tuesday* hammered at the closed door of her mind, and she heard it as echoing down a long, dull corridor, and forgot it again.

"What does it matter? Here we all are—it's so far from everything—Peter will take care of us . . ."

His arm tightened about her.

"Yes, yes, I know," he said gently. "It's all right, dear."

And suddenly it was dark, and what had been an etching of a crescent moon was a delicate, lambent melon-segment with a tiny star for pendant, and the trees withdrew from them, whispering mysteriously among

themselves, and the noisy quiet of the evening woods began to wake all about them.

Sister's subdued snorings (her mug of condensed milk and water still ringed in her slender hands) woke Mattie from an almost-dream, and, while she packed the sleepy children away, Peter washed and polished and burned left-over scraps in his embers. Then, while he tramped to the spring for fresh water, she got ready for bed, drugged with a sleep beyond the belief of committees and boards, and lay so many fathoms deep in it that when he came softly in again and stood over her, musing, smiling gently at her arm thrown over the blanketed Sister nestled close to her, she never felt him there, nor waked, nor even dreamed of him!

Years afterward it was morning, and everything through the cave door was lacquered blue and green, scent of balsam and bird twitters. Peter and Peep were nowhere, a great kettle of hot water waited the late risers, and only as they stepped outside, fresh braided and curled, Sister in providentially discovered denim overalls, did the returning fishermen greet them with five, speckled, shiny treasures impaled on Peep's proud twig.

"I—I caught *two* of 'em!" he whispered religiously, "that next-to-the-biggest one was mine!"

Then Peter, mixing flour and baking powder mysteriously, and fussy beyond reason over the state of his outside fire; then pancakes; pancakes fluffy and shadowed with lacy brown on top, pancakes crisp and crackling on the edges, pancakes covered with maple syrup, pancakes that one ate, regardless of age, sex, or previous condition of servitude to Doctor Stanchon!

"I shall die," said Martha confidently, but, "No one dies, camping," said Peter, "have another!"

She went in to shake the beds and rearrange the last sack of stores, still unpacked ("I'll leave everything all tidy, anyway, for Dicky, to-morrow!") and, as she entered the cave, she saw Peter, staring doubtfully at a scrap of newspaper in his hand, standing near the fire. He thrust out the sheet toward the dying embers, drew back his hand, and, as she moved through the door, pushed the irregular, torn sheet among his kitchenware and went out abruptly, but not before she had caught a strange, perplexed glance he had aimed, apparently, over her head.

Burning with curiosity, Mattie dragged out the printed triangle and skimmed it hastily. It was greasy and odorous of bacon—a bit of wrapping-paper, evidently. So Peter had just seen it himself. It took her but a moment to master it and another to run out and catch his arm as he bent to the constant wood chopping of the forethoughtful camper.

"Peter!" she cried accusingly.

"We-ell?"

"Did you know this when we came?"

"This? What's 'this'?"

"Now, don't try to put me off, Peter! Is it true—all this about the feud?"

"You've read it, Mat; you know as much as I do!"

"Is it true that between Job's Hollow and the river these Heaton brothers are supposed to be hiding, and that they are desperate? That the sheriff is searching the woods? That they're going to fire on sight?"

"I don't think there's any cause for alarm, dear—really."

Peter's expression was a curious mixture of concern and evasion—had she been interested in his expression.

"I wouldn't begin to count the children, if I were you.

These feuds are purely local affairs, you know, and they have nothing against strangers, absolutely. There's no reason why it should interfere with—with our plans.

"Don't be imbecile, Peter," she said shortly. "Do you mean to say that if we go riding calmly around on that mule, or you and Peep go off to get the police, or anything——"

"My dear Mattie! Police in Job's Hollow!"

"Well, it says sheriff, doesn't it? Can you say that you may not run into them and get shot to pieces?"

"We-ell, I shouldn't necessarily expect it."

"Nonsense! Can you assure me——"

"My dear girl, I can't *assure* you of anything. Who can? But I am perfectly willing to run whatever risk may be necessary——"

"Then I'm not."

Mattie tried to meet his eye firmly, but could not do so, to her great displeasure. Peter's eyes sought the ground most uncharacteristically but most obstinately. This only served to fan the flame of her suspicions.

"I don't think you have any right—any moral right—to leave us here," she said; "oh, Peter, how could you? Of course, those horrible brothers wouldn't *mean* to shoot you, but if they meet the sheriff and begin shooting—what does it say?" and she consulted the telltale bacon paper.

"'*Ezra Heaton is a practically dead shot and is reported as saying that, if it comes to a showdown and he and his brother are surrounded, no one shall leave the woods alive. Henderson Heaton, with whom most of the surrounding countryside is in sympathy, is known to be well supplied with ammunition*'—Oh, what was that?"

A shot, muffled by distance, broke the stillness of the

woods. Mattie seized his arm and dragged him into the cave, clucking the children before her like a worried hen. Peter allowed himself to be conducted, but stood uneasily in the door.

"Well, but, Mattie, how about Tuesday?" he inquired, eying her doubtfully. "You understand that you can't——"

"I understand that I can't run the risk of having my husband and children shot in order to sit by Lucia Stanchon on a platform and hear her bang on the table with a wooden mallet," said Mattie briskly. "You might at least be practical, Peter!"

He drew a long breath.

"Then, come on, Peep!" he cried, "let's scout our way over to the creek and get to work! I can bag some squirrels and maybe a rabbit, and you must get to fishing again. We've got the family to support now, you know."

"All right!" said Peep, soberly, "and I've got that little shotgun, you know, Daddy, if—if they *do* fire!"

Peter patted his lean little shoulder in silence.

At the last Martha would not let them go alone, but tagged along, as her son put it disgustedly, with the baby, and sat idly on a rock, over the brown, bubbling water, watching it run by with a curious, empty pleasure, while Sister fished industriously with a bent pin and tied her dripping hair-ribbon to the leg of an unwary turtle.

After three days of safety she consented to Peter's going as far as the abandoned buckboard for the extra flour and potatoes he had left there, and, when he reported that all was quiet along the trail, her nerves, refreshed by the constant velvety air and the physical relief of washing, sweeping, and tramping, allowed her

to consider a return on the mule and reassuring telegraphic dispatches, which should precede them and discover the missing Stetson.

That curious look of Peter's which she had marked when he presented her with eggs, soap, and candles, besides the flour and potatoes, a look which had faded into real relief when she had accepted them simply, without comment—that curious, almost timid look came into his eyes again.

"I was going to tell you, Mat," he said slowly, "I'm afraid you can't count on the mule. He's gone."

"Gone?" she echoed, confused and incredulous of such blundering misfortune, "*gone?* Then how are we to get back?"

"Why, I—I could walk over," he began slowly, "and get another——"

"And leave us here alone? Never—never in the world!"

"That donkey was tied," observed Peep thoughtfully, "can donkeys untie ropes?"

"In circuses, yes," said Sister unexpectedly, "in woods, I don't know!"

Peter turned his back and blew his nose.

"We shall wait here for Dicky Varnham," Mattie announced with firmness, "we shall wait here, if it is all summer. I don't know what Lucia will think, and I only hope Fräulein can keep the servants. They'll know we're with you, anyhow."

"Yes. They'll know you're with me," said Peter.

After that the long, blue days melted softly into the long, starry nights and no one marked them. Peter shot one, then two, then three magnificent deer, on the ground that they were going to bite Peep, and, promising that he would take none in the Adirondack Club that

year, eased his conscience. They cured the skins with salt and Peter taught them to pack the hams in salt, too. Mattie wondered vaguely where all that salt came from and decided that the providential *cache* under the buckboard must have been filled with it. Peep discovered a wonderful, cool, spray-wet cavelet under a waterfall below the bend of the creek, and there the steaks lasted beyond belief of those dependent upon porcelain refrigerators.

Each day she said to herself, "I must think out a way to get us home; Peter seems incapable of it and Dicky must have had some accident—or perhaps he knows about the feud, too."

But every day there was so much to do!

To shake the beds, to drag the blankets out to the sun, to heat the water, to cleanse the pots and plates which she had learned to keep so few, to broom the floor, to bring in chips and faggots, to wash out the under-flannels that would soon be too warm, to bury the waste neatly, to get all ready for Peter, the cook—lo, it was dinner time!

To wash up; to listen to the saga of her men's day; to nap a little, like a kitten, in the sun; to talk a little German to Sister, who seemed to have spent her few, if experienced, years in teaching English to a series of ambitious Fräuleins; to chat lazily with Peep, amazed at his curious, shy notions, told her freely for the first time in two years; to toss the big leather ball with him and his father till she ran, red and dripping, to the shallow pool that the sun had warmed—lo, supper was ready!

To pack away the children, full of venison soup and crumbled biscuit, to lie warm on the army blanket, under the filling moon, the prosaic venison hash and pancakes

a poetic memory now; to smoke endless cigarettes, for Peter rolled them for her out of his bottomless pouch; to talk and talk with him of tiny matters for which one used long words and of great things for which only short words are found—lo, it was sleeping time, and more than once they lay there, blanket-rolled, all the long fragrant night and the lemon and apricot of the dawn crept across their closed eyes!

For the first time in many, many months Martha lived neither in the past of her mistakes nor the future of her hopes—that clear, successful future, with all the knots unraveled!—but in the immediate and tiny present, and found it strangely good. A wonderful *bien-être,* that product of various labors in the open, filled her veins; her vitality, steadily on the increase, unspent in the thousand and one petty drains of the winter, fell back upon her soul, as the dews fall back upon the sea, and lightened her spirit so that merely to live was to love life.

"Why did I mind so much? Why did I bother?" she thought, vaguely, of that life behind the woods, *"why did I try so hard?"*

Sister's curls had long since been cut with a hunting knife, and Martha's undulated locks had long since been hanging in squaw-braids, when Peep's daring attempt at a fire nearly burned them out. As it was, it took five hard hours of unremitting, blackened, panting struggle, when the blankets soaked in water, the ponchos, last of all Mattie's heavy skirt, beating at the blazing stumps, saved the day. Muscular and agile, erect in her slim knickerbockers, her dark braids whipping the air, she beat and stamped and poured; and when, the excitement over, they lay exhausted on the rocks and laughed at the knickers, torn and burned, rubbed venison fat on their hands,

and washed down their cold bacon and potatoes with bowls of strengthening coffee, they caught, each in the other's eyes, a warming glint of honest admiration.

"You're an old trump, Mat!" said Peter sleepily, "let's stay out here—the kidlets are all right and I'm too tired to move. We'll hunt up that skirt to-morrow."

But the smoldering heart of a young pine tree had quietly charred the heavy woolen stuff away, and, when he brought it to her, chagrined, she laughed, and put on her bathing suit!

After that they threw tradition to the winds and Mattie's white knees grew tanned and scratched, and Peep and Sister wore the same blue flannel swimming clothes morning, noon and night. The days grew so warm that they spent an hour at a time in the shallow pool and dried off in the sun. Peep shot up before their eyes, and Sister's waxing stomach threatened her waist bands. They had no calendar, and needed none. Mattie thought regretfully, in spare moments, of an enraged Lucia (Lucia must be about her trousseau, now, in Paris—if she had gone to Paris!) How Lucia would scold if she knew about her absent secretary! She thought of Peter's neglected office, and wondered, mistily, if they were losing much money, but——

"I can't help it—I can't let him go and be here alone—Dicky *must* come soon!"

And Peter never hinted that the office needed him, and looked so tall and brown and splendid, and it was so idiotically sweet to do the obvious, simple, necessary things he told one to do and not worry!

Once he was gone longer than usual and Martha, groping about the bottom of the box that held the bacon, for a bit of old newspaper to read, dragged out a half sheet of crumpled print, and, smoothing it carefully,

noted mechanically that a rough triangular bit was gone from one corner. The shape of that bit was printed on her memory, but, with a quick gesture, she caught it out from behind the stacked cartridges on the ammunition-ledge and fitted it in. The edges matched exactly —and the date on the large sheet was three years old!

First white and then red came under the tan of her firm cheeks, and, even as she sat with the sheet before her, Peter strode into the cave with a string of pickerel.

"We had to go two miles for these, Mat," he began, but stopped short under her eyes.

"Well?" he said, low and abruptly, "well?"

Mattie never knew what she meant to say: at the sight of his shamed, stiff face, all the joy whipped out of it at once, she crumpled the telltale paper into a shapeless wad and flung it at the fire.

"My poor boy—did you want me so much?" she cried, with a sudden sob.

He crushed her into the stained, torn khaki coat.

"Oh, Mat, you'll never *know* how I wanted you!" he whispered . . .

Late that night, under the spangled sky, she confessed her penitent, drawing mercilessly from him the least details of his deep cunning.

"And that boy came and got the horse? The same boy that brought the potatoes and pork?"

He nodded abjectly into her warm shoulder.

"And Dicky knew all the time?"

"Yes."

"And Fräulein?"

"Ye-es. That is, I said you might stay s-some time."

"It doesn't matter about *her:* Sister knows more Ger-

man now than when she left home—are you laughing, Peter?"

A hawk, chasing a calling owl, swept over them: the pines sent incense through the night.

"How long had you planned about that newspaper?"

"Honestly, Mat, I never saw it till I tore it off the bacon just before you came in. I noticed *Job's Hollow* in it and I *did* think, 'suppose she saw it,' you know, and then I changed my mind——"

"Yes, I saw you changing it."

"And I felt such a sneak when you believed it so quickly, Mat!"

"I should hope so," she said severely.

A red squirrel chattered angrily at something or other; the moon sank softly. The Milky Way grew clearer and the pines murmured softly. As often, on these nearly windless nights, they heard the waterfall below the bend. He slept quietly, his head on her shoulder.

It was Doctor Stanchon who strode in on them one sunny September afternoon, checking and bursting into deep laughter at the barelegged, rubber-shod gypsy who lay on a pine-needle bed under a rock ledge, a faded swimming suit her only dress, a brown, giggling girl rolling over her, tickling her with pine needles, a half-naked brown boy nested in the tree above them, dropping down pine cones with malicious aim.

"Talk about dryads and fauns!" he shouted, "you look like a fox with her cubs! Get up and tell me howdy, you poor white trash—where's your manners?"

"How did you get here?" she gasped.

"A boy with a mule and a sack of potatoes brought me," he said placidly. "Before that I had a map. Dick Varnham's car part of the way. He's up at the Lake.

He sent his regards and hopes you found the cave up to specifications. Did you? How're the headaches?"

"You needn't think I don't know all about it," she answered seriously, sitting up in her long-time skirtless bathing suit and shaking her squaw-braids at him.

"It was you put Peter up to it. He's fishing—he'll be back. Of course you'll stay? You can sleep downstairs, with the children."

"I'll sleep where I see fit," he said, kissing her cheek. "You're a nice little girl, Mattie, when you're not running the universe. How's the head?"

"O, I don't have them any more," she assured him, "at least not here. I forgot about them. How's Lucia?"

"All right, thanks, just back from Paris. The towels are all marked and the invitations are ordered and Mrs. Fitch has begun on the house—I understand it's to be the model, for its size, in the town. They certainly got a bargain—hello, Peter!"

Later, as they lay about the red fire, Peter's guest-pancakes, with special maple syrup, achieved and appreciated, and Peter's extra pipe in use, their drowsy guest, nodding after that first day of tramping, looked at them quizzically.

"Before I go off to sleep, which I'm going to do in exactly eight minutes," he said, "tell me, are you ever coming back?—for you don't look it. Is the cave leased indefinitely?"

Martha looked straight at his kindly, sleepy face.

"Not exactly," she said, "though in many ways we'd like it. But I expect to be busy this winter, so——"

"For heaven's sake, Mattie, you're not going to begin committeeing again?"

"Not so much, dear, not so much, truly," she assured him. "I did too much, I admit it. And I'm not so sure,

now, that it comes to much in the end, anyhow. And Sister does better with me, I think (I'm going to ask that nice Miss Gillatt to come to us and help me, and give Betty our Fräulein—she always wanted her) and I've promised Peep to take some walks with him in the afternoons. But that isn't what's making us leave the cave this winter."

"Then what?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, dear, it's only just about big enough for us four—and next winter, you see . . ."

He looked at her keenly.

"My *dear* child! I *am* delighted!" he cried.

The moon sank softly, and they slept under the stars.

CHAPTER XV

Double-Harness

IT was October before Mattie saw New York again. Marie suggested that the Thanksgiving turkey would undoubtedly have been eaten in the famous cave had it not been that Mrs. Peter Forsythe's dress for the wedding was in question. Lucia had been her own mob-capped, Kate Greenaway flower-girl fourteen years ago, and had exacted from her a laughing promise to be her bridesmaid, in return, whenever the ceremony should warrant it; and it was as matron-of-honor, with Sister Forsythe in that very Kate Greenaway costume, walking before her, that Mattie, still lightly tanned and swinging free with the smooth stride of a wood goddess, preceded Lucia up the white-ribboned aisle.

A summer of Paris (for Lucia had found that it would, somehow, be quite possible for her to take three months off) even though punctuated by important trips to German, French, and Italian prisons and solemn reports thereon, had changed the somewhat abstracted stare in her blue-gray eyes. She had seemed more like the Lutie of old times, Mattie confided to Betty Girard.

"Though I must say I never in my life saw anybody that looked so—so just the same . . . after it!" she added shyly.

Betty, shaking with laughter, had pinched her ear; Martha complained that everybody, at some time or other, pinched her ear!

"You dear, early-Victorian goose!" she cried, "do you still persist in believing that marriage and . . . 'after it' . . . is a crucial point? What an idea! I honestly believe that the thing about the wedding that moved Lutie most was that silver tray those ex-convicts sent her!"

"I know. Ri-ri said she cried," said Mattie soberly. "And, of course, it *was* touching. Do you know, Betty, Miss Gillatt said she was surprised that it was like any other wedding—wasn't that funny?"

"Oh, I don't know. Miss Ferris said the same thing. Don't you see what she meant, stupid? Considering Lute's beliefs—or the lack of them—and Max's, one would have been justified in expecting a marriage before the registrar—or is it a Justice of the Peace in America?"

"I think you go to City Hall," Mattie suggested seriously, "I had a nurse once that did."

"But it never works out that way," Betty said scornfully. "When it comes to the scratch, I notice that it's the 'Voice that breathed o'er Eden,' just the same, for all of us! If there'd been one yard of satin ribbon scant, or one shade of the Doctor's tie off the right color, or one usher she hadn't sat out dances with, Lute would have been furious!"

"I wonder how they'll manage—everybody's awfully interested," Mattie murmured thoughtfully.

Everybody was, undoubtedly. Marie Fitch, jumping briskly from her new motor into the crisp air of the Christmas holidays, was particularly interested.

She rang the bell, stepped inside the tiny vestibule, and, tapping the shining knocker sharply, slipped into the fresh, white-painted hall with her usual quick, bird-like motion, but stopped suddenly, even as Max Fettauer's butler-valet-office-man-chauffeur drew her swathing vel-

vet coat from her shoulders; and standing, she fingered the sash-curtains on the sidelights pensively.

"I don't like that ivory tint, after all," she said thoughtfully, "have these been washed yet, Joseph?"

"Madame, no," he assured her respectfully.

"They're all right by day, but they'll have to be deeper for night, I think," she mused; "I'll send up some real ecru, I think."

"Bien, Madame."

"I'm a little late; Mrs. Fettauer down?"

"Madame, no. Madame has not yet come in. But the doctor, he is here, and if madame will come to the library . . ."

Marie lifted her flexible eyebrows and trailed her twisting olive train up the stairway, tapping the wall authoritatively halfway.

"Don't try to wash that off, Joseph—take stale bread," she said abruptly; "I'm sorry to say it spots."

"Bien, madame."

"The office walls wash all right, don't they?"

"Perfectly, madame. To-day only, Kat'rine and I have cleaned it, the office, entire."

"Does the doctor like his office, Joseph?" she asked from the landing.

"The doctor, he prefers his office to all the house, madame. Only yesterday he speak of it to madame."

"That's good," and she walked into the library, her slim arm outstretched.

"How are you, Max?"

Fettauer sprang from his leather chair, threw away the inevitable cigarette, and took her hand warmly.

"My dear Mrs. Fitch! This is always such a pleasure!"

He looked very young. Marie found herself think-

ing that his smile was more boyish, even, than before his marriage.

"Lucia's not in, Joseph tells me. I hope nothing's the matter? She's not ill or anything?"

"Heavens, no. Was Lucia ever ill?"

She laughed and perched on the arm of his chair's mate.

"I believe there is a legend that she had jaundice in Rome, once," she replied; "but somebody went to the hospital, full of flowers and sympathy, and found her cleaning it and reorganizing the staff!"

"Naturally. I wonder she didn't drain the Campagna! Seriously, though, she's very naughty, and I apologize for her. The grand high muck-a-muck of all prisons—from Ohio, I think he is—who was to honor us to-night as your *vis-à-vis*, is making a speech somewhere, and Lucia is introducing him. It seems the mayor was late, and they couldn't begin without him, and the speech was long, and the reception bids fair to be longer. So Lucia telephoned we were not to wait too long, and you would understand! I hope you do?"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" and Marie subsided into the claret-colored leather chair. "What's the difference? How's everything with you?"

"Quite all right, thanks. I hope you're admiring your handiwork!"

Marie gazed appreciatively about the snug, rich colored room. The dull gold walls above the lines of dim-tinted books, the dark red leather, the long, narrow mahogany table with the homelike student lamps, the tiny tables ready to each deep-seated armchair, had been her special study.

"Do you agree with me now about the curtains, young man?" she challenged him, "or do you still think the room could stand more red?"

"You were right, as always," he assured her with a gallant wave of the hand, "anything but this particular goldy-olive would have been impossible! Seriously, Mrs. Fitch, you've made us so fine and prosperous looking that I feel a little ashamed of us: it's hard to remember that we aren't as rich as we look!"

"Nonsense," she said brusquely, but he knew that she was pleased.

"It's not that; it's my informing all your friends what gifts would fit into my scheme, that's all. So everything counted, and there were comparatively few gilt clocks and odd chairs and fish-sets! People really liked it, I think—it took away some of the responsibility."

"It certainly was a wonderful scheme," he said admiringly.

"You see, all those doctors at the hospital would have given different things, and, when I suggested this table, they were delighted. The same way with the dining-room set; the Forsythes, the Varnhams, the Girards—all the crowd—simply whooped with joy at the idea. And, of course, they know you're using it all the time, and everybody's pleased."

"It's much too handsome for us."

"That's silly, Max. I got it at that Leydendecker sale, you see, from the house at Albany, and few dealers knew of it. And I got the bottom price. You couldn't pick it up in New York for anything like the price, of course. I wanted dreadfully to write to your brother and suggest the dining-room rug, but I was glad I hadn't had the cheek, afterward, when I saw that family silver chest!"

"Oh, that's our regulation wedding gift," he explained, "it's the third, now, and the last, probably, for my sister is very unlikely to marry. I was amazed that she would

dream of coming to be bridesmaid—really, Mrs. Fitch, I couldn't believe her letter!"

"She was so interesting . . . I realized for the first time, Max, that you were really a foreigner when I saw her. And Count von Ette—oh, why don't we have uniforms like that? He was the most beautiful best-man I ever beheld."

"Fritz *is* a handsome peacock," he agreed, "but, Oh, Mrs. Fitch, you should hear him on the American girl!"

"You mean to say he didn't reciprocate? They adored him, you know. Cynthia Girard and Nancy Varnham nearly came to blows over him."

"I know. Will you promise never to tell if I tell you what he said about those young ladies?"

"Never!"

"He told Nette that they should have been spanked back to the school room!"

Marie laughed and settled back comfortably into the padded chair.

"I never could quite understand, Max, how you took such a risk," she ventured softly, "*any* American girl would have been a dangerous experiment—but Lutie! How did you dare?"

"She was the only girl I ever wanted to marry," he said simply.

"Really?"

She studied his dark, controlled face narrowly. More and more he interested her, this clean-cut young surgeon, to whom Lucia had yielded "because it was easier to marry him than argue about it."

"Somehow I've always fancied that Lutie would marry a much older man," she said, "her friends are all so much older than she is."

"Her women friends, yes," he answered quickly, "but older men don't care for her, do they?"

"Why, I believe you're right!" she cried, "how ridiculous I never thought of it! Isn't that interesting?"

"That's the type," he began slowly, rolling a cigarette thoughtfully between his white, broad-tipped fingers. "It was one of the first things I noticed about Lucia. Do you remember the first time I met you, Mrs. Fitch? It was a party of inspection to the Tombs."

"Oh, I know! We were just getting into the prison work!"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, you hadn't any idea of all this great prison investigation and reform, then; Lucia was following up the career of one of the urchins in her boys' club."

"I remember."

Marie smiled reminiscently and her sharp face softened.

"That was three years ago, wasn't it?" she said.

"Quite. Well, I was asked to go around with 'the crowd' and see what had happened to the young lad—he had just escaped the juvenile court, and wasn't really old enough, Lucia insisted, for police courts. I had just been operating—under Bull—and wanted to shake off the strain, for it was a tricky proposition, and, if it failed, I'd get the blame. If it succeeded, of course, that was another matter."

He paused, glanced at the handsome ship's clock on the mantel (a wedding gift from the officers of his first voyage) and pressed his lips together for the fraction of a second.

"Will the doctor have——"

"Yes, Joseph, serve dinner directly. Madame will not dress, when she comes."

Marie took his ceremonious arm and they entered the dining-room, no detail of which escaped her proprietary eye.

"You don't find the white paint too much, Max?"

"On the contrary, I like it immensely. The ordinary New York dining-room is a cavern."

"So it seems to me. And I thought one dark room was enough. I couldn't resist the library. But I think Lute makes a mistake putting those embroidered things on the sideboard; they're splotchy."

"They shall be removed," he assured her, amused. Then, when the soup steamed before them:

"What a wonderful wedding present this was, Mrs. Fitch! Did anyone ever have one like it, I wonder!"

"I loved to do it," she answered eagerly, "I never enjoyed a present so much. Of course, I've done lots of entire houses, but never quite like this, for a friend, and one I knew so intimately as Lutie. It was great fun to try to express her personality—and yours," she added with a sly glance at him. "Of course, I had to guess, more or less, there."

"My compliments on your intuitions, madame!" he smiled at her.

"What do you like best?" she begged.

"My office and the drawing room," he replied promptly.

"Good. They're the best rooms. Of course, a small house like this is easier in a great many ways."

They ate in silence, smiling sympathetically at the dejected *soufflée* which had not been able to adapt itself as philosophically as the host and guest to the twenty minutes' delay.

"Your sister was most amusing about my doing it all," she began, "(not at all, I don't object to mutton a

little over done). 'Fancy allowing anyone to decorate and furnish one's home!' she said to me, when I escorted her through the house. 'Do you mean that you are arranging her bedroom? That you decide upon the kitchen?'

"'Indeed, yes, Fräulein, down to the pepper-mill,' I assured her. She threw her hands in the air."

"And cried *'du Liebe!'* no doubt," Fettauer added.

"Just that. Tell me, did *you* think it strange?"

"Not at all. I knew the type. As Lucia put it, 'Marie has made a special study of all this, and knows a lot better than I do. We're lucky to have her taste.' It's the American point of view, dear Mrs. Fitch, and there's a lot to be said for it, as a matter of fact. That it would be my own point of view—" he shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"And yet you let me handle your offices?"

He smiled into her eyes.

"In the first place, I was curious," he said frankly. "In the second place, I knew I had to do with a clever, practical woman. In the third place, I foresaw what I have recognized since—that you would know quite as as much what to leave undone as what to do. My offices, dear lady, were masterly outlines—for me to fill in."

She laughed.

"But Lutie didn't know that," she said.

"Oh! Lucia's intuitions run along other lines."

"The prison muck-a-muck won't get a tongue-mousse like that, wherever he's dining," she suggested; "she's probably giving him ale and ham sandwiches in the probationers' restaurant."

"To show the gentleman the workings of your scheme —quite right," he agreed placidly. "I am only grateful

not to have a household staff from the Bedford Reformatory and a cook from Blackwell's Island!"

(*"You little know how nearly you had them, my young friend!"*) thought Marie.

"It was ale and sandwiches we had that night I began telling you about," he went on, digging into a squat, orange-colored cheese. "And, while we tucked them away (Lord, I was hungry!) it suddenly occurred to me, as I looked about the table, where we were squeezed almost too close to eat and the smoke from everybody's cigarettes blurred like a cloud, that the ages of the party were curiously distributed.

"There was Miss Lucia Stanchon, twenty-eight, and looking older; there were you and Mrs. Forsythe and Mrs. Varnham, somewhere under forty, I thought; and there were little Van Wynken and that young Count What's-his-name, that he played about with, and Bobby du Long and me—and not one of them over twenty-six, and I, the oldest, was just thirty."

"Why, to be sure!"

Marie nodded confirmatively.

"I never thought of that," she said, adding quickly, "but you must remember, Max, that there was a sort of reason for that, after all. You see, Peter Forsythe and Dick Varnham and—and my husband wouldn't have been dragged on such an expedition for anything in the world. Men of that age——"

"Oh, I understand all that. Although I'd like to suggest to you that Herr Peter has a flourishing boys' club and Mr. Varnham plays baseball once a week with the lads in the villages near Hawkfield, by the way! But what I mean is that no man of her age—or the equivalent of her age—likes to do what Lucia likes to do. The Americans of thirty-five, say, which is the least age she

could afford to associate herself with definitely, don't play with Lucia, somehow. Three years ago, before everybody was dancing, as they do now, your husbands didn't care to dance, nor to play tennis—with women, nor to visit police courts—with women, and eat sandwiches in rathskellers afterward—with women."

"That's true," Marie agreed.

"And yet the sisters of her young men bored Lucia—*n'est-ce-pas?*"

"That's true," she repeated.

"As a matter of fact, now, do Peter Forsythe and Dick Varnham and Mr. Fitch like my wife?"

"Oh, Max, what a question! We've been pals, all of us, for years and years!"

"I know. But be honest and tell me, now, since we're on the subject; do they, personally, without regard to their wives' friendship for her, like her?"

Marie laughed, refused Joseph's grapes and pears, and lighted a cigarette from his tiny alcohol flame.

"Let's have coffee in the library, shall we?" she suggested.

Then, as they relaxed, each in a deep wine-colored seat, she laughed again.

"You're quite right about the husbands, Max," she admitted.

"Peter doesn't approve of Lutie, and feels that she enticed his precious Mattie out of the home-circle into what he calls 'that damned prison-work.' Did you hear —you must have—how he abducted her and hid her away all last summer, literally in a cave in the woods, with the children, and 'cured her,' as he says? It certainly agreed with Mattie, though; I admit that. Then Dick Varnham and Lute always fight—always have. He says she's clever enough, but he's darned if he'll be bossed out of

his boots by any woman alive! He says she tried to dictate the temperature of his bath."

Fettauer chuckled.

"But they respect each other, really. And they really get along pretty well, working on the farm at Hawkfield. They built a dam together once."

She laughed out suddenly.

"Dick said a dam was an awfully convenient thing to build with Lutie—you could refer to it frequently and relieve your feelings!"

"And Mr. Fitch?" Max suggested. Her face hardened. Few people who knew her well mentioned Randall Fitch unnecessarily to his wife.

"O, Ranny detests Lutie," she said lightly; "they never meet. He calls her the spot-light uplifter, and she says she really can't know men who wear checked trousers. It's simply one of those antipathies. . . ."

"Of course," he nodded, fitting his own after-dinner cigar into its pasteboard holder.

"How about Walter Girard?"

"O, Walter!"

Marie pursed her lips doubtfully. "Walter's different, you know. He's not really in 'the crowd'; I doubt if Walter ever was in any crowd. He's a queer, solitary, self-reliant sort of fellow, and I don't think he looks at women. Queerly enough, I think Lutie rather likes him; they play golf together. She says he never speaks, though. How Betty endures it I don't know—I believe he'd be perfectly happy on a desert island."

"I hate to think of Madame Betty on a desert island," he said smiling.

"Betty? Don't worry! She'd fascinate the nearest merman and he'd swim away with her, wherever she wanted to go!"

"Would she like it when she got there?" he added quietly.

"You're very clever, Master Max," she told him, "but don't criticise our Betty! You can't apply the same rules to a woman of genius—ah, there's Lutie, now!'

"That certainly resembles her slam," Lucia's husband agreed quietly, as its echoes resounded through the house.

"Is that Joseph she's talking to?" Marie wondered aloud, but a hearty bass laugh and a heavier step than Joseph's on the first flight of stairs prepared them for the big, good-natured, sack-coated fellow that entered the library at Lucia's heels.

"Well! you certainly look very comfy, you two!"

Lucia stood in the doorway staring aggrievedly at them.

Her fur-trimmed toque had slipped to one side, her muff bulged with papers. A wisp of warm, molasses-colored hair lay along her cheek. She looked tired, but above the dark circles under them her eyes beamed triumphantly, and her boyish smile was as compelling as ever, though her cheeks were pale and a little too heavily lined for the beginning of the evening.

"Woof! I'm nearly dead! Is there anything left for us to eat? Hello, Max. How's Ri-ri to-night? This is Mr. Ben Braden, of the Ohio Penitentiary, people! And he's nearly as starved as I am. Perfectly grand meeting, children—over fourteen hundred, and the mayor made the speech of his life!'

"You crazy child, do you mean to say you haven't eaten?"

Marie started to draw the pins from the fur toque, but Lucia shook her head violently.

"Heavens, don't touch it, Ri-ri! I've had it on all

day. When do you think I had time to eat? I had a glass of milk at six, though. Anything for us, Joseph?"

"Joseph looks worried," Marie suggested.

"Joseph's got to learn," said his mistress shortly. "I wish Max would have let me bring Potts with me—he was used to odd meals. And father was willing."

Marie smiled at her host.

"Perhaps Potts wasn't quite so used to Max's office work as he was to odd meals," she said.

But Fettauer's smile was merely polite.

"Let me show you the way to the dining-room, Mr. Braden," said he, and, as the big westerner looked doubtfully at his ungloved hands, Lucia shook her head impatiently.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't stop to wash!" she cried plaintively, "or I shall faint on the floor. Come right on with me—you can take a Turkish bath afterward, if you like!"

Braden burst into a great laugh.

"I don't believe there's much chance of this little lady fainting!" he said admiringly, "she ought to be out in Ohio, with us. She certainly can put things through!"

"And you consider that a peculiarity of the residents of Ohio?" Max inquired, "dear me! Come down one flight further, Mr. Braden, and inspect my lavatory. Lucia, we'll be with you in a moment."

Marie smiled to herself as Lucia shrugged her shoulders and dropped into her seat at the table.

"Max is so obstinate," she murmured, "Joseph, bring me a cocktail directly."

But Joseph placed a cup of hot soup before her even as she spoke.

"Dr. Fettauer tells me that this is the first thing madame eats," he said gently.

"Nonsense! Some Scotch, then—oh, well, I'm too tired to argue . . ." and she gulped the soup hungrily.

Marie watched her in silence. Was it her firm, cleft chin, her brusque gestures, or simply the shade too much of flesh that cased her taut muscles? Whatever it was, Lucia looked older, almost, than her young husband.

(*"And she's three years younger,"* mused her friend, *"in five years—there'll be no doubt of it. I believe it's all this managing."*)

"Max is down on cocktails, then?" she asked, as Joseph hurried in with some apologetic slices of mutton.

"Always was. Of course, it's nonsense—nothing else pulls me together so; but he says that if I depend on them whenever I'm rushed to death, I'd be in an inebriate's ward—because I'm always rushed! Of course, there may be something in that, you know. . . ."

And Lucia's warm, gray eyes flashed with the old jolly, compelling charm into Marie's, so that the other woman laughed in spite of herself.

"O, Lutie, you child!" she sighed, "will you ever grow up? And yet," returning to her first thought, "you look grown up enough to-night, God knows! Aren't you getting fat? What do you weigh now?"

"For heaven's sake, Marie, do you suppose I spend my time on the scales?"

Lucia broke her dinner roll irritably. "Bring me some butter, Joseph—I'm famished. And I'd rather have ale than that Moselle."

"Bien, madame," and Joseph scurried behind the beautiful leather screen that Marie had advised the Woman's Auxiliary to present to their Chairman.

"A bottle of madame's ale—and be quick!" he hissed from mysterious inner spaces.

"It's all very well for you to make a fool of yourself

on one square meal a day, if you want to, but I couldn't get through what I have to without food, believe me!"

"But, my dear, you select such fattening food!"

"All right—I tell you I'm simply all gone without it, Marie! I simply cannot go from eight to one without a glass of milk, if you mean that."

"Oh, very well! It's not my affair. As long as Max is pleased——"

"Indeed! And do you suppose that I eat in order to please Max? I managed to nourish myself so as to put through what I had to for some time before I met Max, and I trust to go on for some time longer on the same basis!"

"It must be jolly for him if you come home in this state of mind often!" Marie remarked placidly.

"Max knew my various states of mind before he married me, didn't he?" Lucia demanded shortly, "did I ever pretend——"

"No, Lutie, you never did," her friend assured her, "I will say that for you."

"Well, then, he knew what he was getting," said Lucia, appeased. "So it's up to him."

"But perhaps he thought you'd change," Marie hazarded.

"Why should he? Why should the fact that I live in this house make me act differently from what I did when I lived in my own? When I changed my name, I didn't change my nature, did I?"

"Evidently not."

Marie stared at her friend through narrowed lids. Never before had she so realized the difference in their ages, the frank change of outlook since she herself had stood, pale and tired, in her white satin, and pronounced, so firm of voice, so vague in thought, her calm *"I do!"*

"Do you know, Lutie, I believe that you really think that's the main fact of marriage—that you live here instead of with Doctor Stanchon!" she burst out.

"You'd think so, if you lived with Max!" said Lucia imperturbably, "he's a regular old maid! I never supposed a doctor could be so fussy about being on time for meals. I thought they ate anywhere, any time, anyhow!"

"I live in the hope of undeceiving you, my dear," and Fettauer escorted his guest into the room. "If you could lunch with us Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, after clinic, and see our controlled rage if one of us reaches the table at one-twenty instead of one-fifteen, you'd see that one member of this family understands and respects his stomach!"

"Oh! So that's why you picked those days for the Office," and Marie motioned Mr. Braden to her side.

"Yes—wasn't it considerate of me?" Lucia threw a saucy glance at her grave young husband and his eyes caught and held hers for a swift, warm moment.

(*"Oho! Old maid, is he?"*) thought Marie, and then, *"I wonder which of you two gets the upper hand, Mrs. Lucia Stanchon Fettauer!"*)

"I'm afraid you'll be eating alone, Braden—Joseph, bring Mr. Braden's soup," Max began, "these public workers get a habit of lunch counters, I believe."

"If you mean that for a brutal dig at me, Max, my lamb, it's no use," his wife cried gaily, "I gave Mr. Braden all the chance in the world to begin with me, but he preferred to prink—or, rather, he had to pretend to prefer to! So if he's starved and lonely—it's his affair."

Mr. Braden smiled at her appreciatively. "You've no kick coming from me, Mrs. Stanchon, I would say, Fettauer," he assured her. "I'm well accustomed—as

I'll bet you are—to eating when I can and being grateful to get it. Especially on a trip like this. Your wife would make a great campaigner, sir," waving his bouillon cup respectfully to Max.

"Or a great *anything,*" he added, draining the squat Chinese bowl with relish, "when I saw that big, bustling restaurant, coppers shining, waiter-girls so attentive, crowded with customers, the system, the neatness, the good, solid food (Yes, thanks—Rye, if you have it handy) I tell you I wished we had her in Ohio!"

He sniffed his mutton and cauliflower with keen interest.

"And I'll bet she runs this home every bit as well!" he cried enthusiastically.

"You will find no takers here, Mr. Braden," said Dr. Fettauer gallantly.

"Oh, housekeeping isn't difficult, Mr. Braden, really," said Lutie, relaxing to a cigarette, full fed, contented, and stimulated unconsciously by the open admiration of the big, breezy fellow.

She lay back in Max's serving chair, flattered, at peace with the world. Food was always an instant tonic to her; and the sense of growing power, of authority, of ability to set "big things" in motion, the while this charming, dignified little establishment revolved so smoothly under her hand, gave her a curious, detached sense of her own personality; she seemed to watch herself, amused.

One moment on a platform, civic dignitaries at her side, attentive faces, mob-like, turned toward her; a moment, again, and the mob, blind now, and surging down the marble steps, was all about her—she was part of it; yet a moment, and the steam of the soup-kettle, the clash of plates, the heat of the great electric broilers made

a new background for the respectful faces that clustered about her. And now, here she was in a silence that one positively felt, after all the movement and clatter, at her own glistening table, her own quiet, clean-scented, clear-spaced rooms; her own soft-stepping butler moving behind the russet and gold leather screen. Strange! Life moved so quickly . . . the pool of garnet roses glowed against the white linen; silver caught the light here and there under the garnet-laced candle shades; how perfectly the entwined monograms of the big dinner napkins were embroidered, frosty and fine! How exquisitely gowned Marie was, how dark and distinguished Max faced her!

It was the very contrasts that made this life of hers so full and fascinating—how bored those women must be who knew but one mode of life, one set little scene! That was why they wanted to be men—but she, Lucia, she didn't want to be a man. Heavens, no!

Her stiff collar pinched her neck—why had she not changed into evening dress? Men couldn't look half so nice at night, and even Marie had admitted that her plumpness improved her shoulders. . . .

"Lutie! Are you asleep? You'll burn yourself!"

She turned dazed eyes on them; the roses in the center of the table blurred and receded to a great red distance, like a sunset, then sprang back sharply into place, as she sat up with a drowsy laugh.

"I—I've been on the go all day!" she murmured.

They smiled at her as at a child. Nothing she did could seem otherwise than engaging to Mr. Braden, it seemed.

"She's a regular human dynamo!" he chuckled delightedly. "I'll bet you it would tire many a man to keep up with her, doctor!"

"Oh, that goes without saying nowadays," Max returned easily.

"It's quite the fashion, you know, Mr. Braden. The man we dined with last Thursday told us he'd been taking a nap, from six to seven, to be ready for Lucia!"

"Now what do you think about that?" their guest demanded, "well, well, well!"

"However," Max went on, "even what we used to call the weaker sex may be supposed to recuperate occasionally, and if I might suggest it, Lucia, you'd better tear yourself away and go to bed! We agreed to take that nine o'clock train for Long Island, you know."

"I know," said Lucia dolefully, "though it was a fiendish thing to propose, that train. Perhaps I'd better. If Mr. Braden——"

"Oh, I'll finish my cigar with your good husband here and jump for my train," Braden assured her, "good night, Mrs. Fettauer—it's a real privilege to meet a woman like you!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Try-Out

"ALL the same," Marie murmured on the stairs, "it's a little hard on poor Max to leave him with your expansive prison friend, Lutie."

"Oh, nonsense!"

Lucia switched on the light and faced Marie crossly in the middle of her bedroom, all grayish blue, with hangings and chintzes of bluish gray.

"Braden's a good fellow and it won't hurt Max a bit to talk a little with people like that—who really do things——"

She pressed a button on the house telephone near her bed.

"I'm not at home, Joseph—never mind who."

"But good heavens, child, doesn't Max do things?"

"Oh, of course . . . you know what I mean, Ri-ri—don't make me angry, now, being stupid!"

Marie closed her lips temperately and while Lucia threw off her tight clothes and the quiet maid picked them up patiently, the friend, sunk for the moment in the decorator, regarded the charming bedroom critically.

"I believe there should have been a little old-rose here, after all," she said, half to herself. "There was too much in that chintz I tried first, so I eliminated it entirely, but it's a little too cold—especially at night. I think I'll make all the chair cushions solid old-rose, *chaise-longue* and all: would you mind that?"

TO-DAY'S DAUGHTER

"Anything you say," said Lucia brightly, struggling with a refractory garter clasp, "pouf! that's off! Now just wait a minute while I get a bath, Marie, will you?"

Wrapped in a trailing smoky-blue *peignoir,* her thick hair in a dull bronze braid, she strolled into the bathroom and, while the odor of her favorite geranium perfume crept steamily into the bed chamber and the splashings of her plunge alternated with her unsteady humming (Lucia could barely carry a tune, but was never without one) Marie studied the room with the interest inseparable from her profession.

It was a curious and characteristic mixture—that infallible betrayal of the soul in all the shells it makes for itself, whether of flesh or silk or stone. Ancestors may arch our noses, architects may measure our lintels, tailors may conceal us with their stretched stuffs; but the twitch of the nostril as we breathe, the angle of the bed as we lie in it, the creases of the coat as we walk in it —could God himself change them, except through us?

So Lucia's room, though her friend's taste and skill and experience had designed it, with only the most obvious and reasonable regard to Lucia's complexion and tastes, spoke as clearly of its mistress' character as the slow growth of furniture and tiny oddments that chance had shaped about her when she was a girl in her father's house. On the austere, glass-topped toilet table that Marie and the modern hygienic simplicity had made fashionable between them, lay one of Lucia's queer luxuries: a magnificent litter of tortoise-shell tools, gold monogrammed. They were costly, breakable, flamboyant; they would have graced the dresser of a musical comedy idol of the hour; but to Lucia they were dear necessities. Dull, they must be polished; broken, they must be mended; lost, they must be replaced.

THE TRY-OUT

Not a chair but one was cushioned, beyond its seat, but against the severe back of the *chaise-longue,* dull blue and gray, Lucia had piled a mongrel heap of cushions whose embroidered, sprawling initials mingled Yale and Harvard in impartial navy and crimson and dated back to boarding school, burnt-poker work that set Marie's teeth on edge. Next to a wonderful etching of a great cathedral interior hung a framed poster of a once adored actor, and below this some Landseer dogs in colored prints—a childish birthday present from her father; while above a wonderful little Monet, hung just at the proper angle for light and value, Lucia had stuck one of Betty Girard's first pen-and-ink double sheets: the famous "golf-man," with Max's profile, in a cheap oak frame picked out with gilt! Ranged photographs of her friends in heavy silver frames littered everything; battered riding-crops made a sort of trophy over the squat book shelves—a girl's room, you would have shrugged, facing it.

But the great mahogany table, soaking in the sunshine of the bay-window, would check you: nearly six feet long, it held orderly piles of reports, type-written sheets, letter-heads, calendars, diaries, docketed files. The desk of an exceptionally competent woman of affairs, with the blotting sheet and vast, bronze ink-well of a company director. The very spirit of orderliness, you would say —but one glance at the telephone, lurching from the top of a three-decked muffin-stand, above a litter of chocolate, old letters, cigarettes, odd gloves, newspaper clippings and half-cut French novels would have left you gasping. Dresses and hats, severe, dark-toned, were crushed together waiting repairs and valeting in Lucia's untidy closet; immaculate, scented lingerie, web-like and ribboned enough for a *demi-mondaine,* lay in lacy, geo-

metric piles in Lucia's great mahogany armoire, a treasure of heavy carving.

"If this room were only one thing or the other!" Marie sighed.

"But *I'm* not one thing or the other, perhaps!" grinned Lucia, collapsing, clean and happy, among the hideous college cushions.

"Reach me a match, Ri-ri."

"That's as true a word as you ever spoke, miss—madam, I mean!" her friend commented sagely. "I suppose that's what keeps us all——"

"Bosh! Don't begin to analyze, for mercy's sake! Look here, Marie, will you do the decorations for the new recreation building at the docks for us? Just in your odd times, I mean?"

Marie's face, which always softened and lighted with her little friendly circle of women friends, stiffened suddenly with the lines of the keen and bitter Mrs. Randall Fitch that her clients admired and feared.

"For love, you mean?" she said shortly.

"Oh, well, you know what we've got. I've worked like thunder to get a year's rent guaranteed and I can't dip into that fund for anything but the strictest necessities. We've got the place clean, but it's a perfect barn. Of course, we wouldn't expect much . . ."

"Now, see here, Lucia, we might just as well get this over now as later. You simply don't understand what you're asking. What's the average sum you're getting from people?"

"Oh, twenty-five . . . fifty—why?"

"Well, I'll give you fifty, if you never ask me to do another thing. I can't afford it."

"Why, Marie Fitch! I sha'n't take it. The idea!"

"Oh, yes, you will. Now, Lucia, decorating is my

business. The competition has grown very keen, nowadays: it's different from when I began."

"But your discounts——"

"All very well. Has it ever occurred to you that I may have other uses for my discounts? When I did this house for you, it was the very best present I could give you—I simply loved to do it. And I'm proud of it, too; I stand behind it. My professional reputation is in it. Don't you realize that it will necessarily—my reputation—go into all this work you want me to do for you? When you say you wouldn't expect much, you're talking nonsense. What do you mean by that? That I'm to do a little of the job very well, and let the rest go, or do all of the job half—or a quarter—well? In either case it's my job, isn't it? It stands for me, doesn't it? You'll tell everybody that Mrs. Randall Fitch decorated it, won't you? Can I afford that, if it isn't well done?"

"Of course, Marie, if you choose to put it that way——"

"But I do choose to put it that way—I must. See here, my child: you passed out of the rank of the lady amateurs this year and became a paid professional worker in this prison business. Very well. Suppose the pure-milk-for-the-slums committee or the employment-for-the-blind committee or the child-labor people should ask you, in view of your great success in organizing your job, to give them a little of your odd time to overhaul and reorganize some of their departments, what would you say?"

"Do you think that's a fair comparison, Marie?"

"Absolutely. Why not? Could you afford it?"

"I notice you did the Professional Women's Club for nothing, though—they bragged about it enough," Lucia put in.

"Precisely. And why? In the first place, that was my personal contribution to a club of which I'm a charter member. We began that club fifteen years ago, when it was a bigger venture than any woman's club could be to-day. It meant more to us, I assure you, than clubs do now. The women who did things stuck more together, and every name meant something. We were all very eager to back up all professional women. Betty painted half the wall decorations; lots of women gave a certain set of royalties on their books and stories; that Doctor Harris that Max's friend married gave a week's office fees, I remember. That was a professional tax—gladly paid. Your house was a friendly gift—gladly given. I stand behind both, willingly, and expect to be judged by them. But why should I take that risk for your prison-reform schemes?"

"Oh, well, of course——"

"Another thing," Marie went on. "For the club-work I set my own time, and did it in the off season. Now, your work must be done like all your affairs—*tout de suite,* immediately, if not sooner. I happen to be extremely busy just now. Of course, I lost on that club job—but that was my affair. I lost on your house and Celestine's tea-house and Mattie's billiard room—but they were my presents to you all, and presents aren't business."

"Oh, don't rub it in, Marie, I see what you mean. Only I wonder, if all you people feel that way, how all the men have helped us so much with *their* professional time and reputation? Why did those nice architects do over the up-the-river boarding house for nothing for us?"

Marie watched her narrowly. "'For *us*?" she repeated, "'for *us*?"

"Well, for *me,* then," said Lucia, frankly.

"Why?" Marie answered, "why? I wonder when you'll find out, Lutie!"

"Oh, well, it was in a good cause, anyway!"

Lucia smiled, but faced her friend bravely.

"You can't take out all the personal effect, Marie, you simply can't. Things go that way, that's all."

"They go that way, just now," Marie returned slowly, "because you and I haven't been at this sort of thing such a terribly long time. People still feel interested and touched by women in business—as women. But in the jobs where they've been for generations—keeping boarding-houses, for instance, and school teaching—I wonder if the hotelmen and the men teachers feel that chivalry much?"

"And you think . . ."

"Of course, I do. Thackeray, even, probably felt it for George Eliot, but do you think Mr. Hall Caine feels it for Miss Marie Corelli? I doubt it."

"I see what you mean," Lucia agreed thoughtfully. She stared ahead of her, digesting the new idea. Then her eyes flashed mischievously.

"All right, Ri-ri—then let's go while the going is good!" she cried gaily.

Marie studied the laughing face, the thrown-back, boyish shoulders.

"That's one way to take it, of course," she said thoughtfully. "After us, the deluge, h'mh? Well, it'll be a deluge, all right enough. I shall be out of it, thank goodness. Of course, when I began, everybody gave me a hand. I was a woman, I had a new idea, I was 'in society,' I needed money. It was *grand chic.* Now, every girl that gets impatient at home wants to be an interior decorator. So there you are."

They sat in friendly silence.

"How you do go into things, Ri-ri!" Lucia began, after a moment.

"Do I? I expect it's because I've been through things. One usually leads to the other."

Again they were silent. Lucia had supposed that after her own marriage she would perhaps be able to touch a little more easily on her friend's experiences with Mr. Randall Fitch, but it seemed that this was not so: if anything, she felt more constrained.

"This is awfully cozy—just like old times, isn't it?" she said lazily.

Marie looked at her oddly.

"It certainly is," she agreed, "a little too much so for Monsieur, perhaps?"

"Max? How ridiculous! Didn't he send me up here himself?"

"My dear child! You were falling asleep in your chair!"

"My goodness, Marie, you'd fall asleep yourself, in my place! What do you think I've done to-day?"

"Oh, I don't doubt——"

"You'd better not! Listen: in the first place, we were at the opera last night, and out to supper after. Then they all went 'round to see the dancing at that new place, and, of course, Van Wynken and I couldn't stand *that,* and we danced till they turned us all out—Van tipped the orchestra, as it was. Well, I had to be called at eight, for I had an appointment at the office at nine. I worked like a dog there till lunch; the warden gave us an interview at three; I had to see that recreation building (they were tinting the plaster all wrong and I lost my temper dreadfully) then met Braden and showed him everything—I'd hate to see that taxi-bill! The meet-

ing I told you about, and that lasted till I took him through the restaurant and staggered home. Of course, after I'd had my dinner I passed away—wouldn't you?"

"Long before, Lutie, long before," said her friend quickly, "it would have been a case of 'please omit flowers' with me by three o'clock."

"Well, then," grunted Lucia, placated, "what are you rowing me for?"

"I'm not rowing you—I'm merely suggesting that the fact that you're all in has nothing to do with the fact that it must be rather dull for Max."

"But, heavens above, Max knows what I'm doing, doesn't he? He agreed to it before we were married, didn't he? He knew the way I worked before, I suppose?"

Marie smiled.

"Ye-es, he knew," she agreed. "But he couldn't have got you any other way, could he?"

Lucia shrugged. "Well, there it is," she said shortly.

"Yes, there it is, all right enough," Marie repeated, "but how long does it stay there?"

"What do you mean?"

Lucia stared in such honest blankness that her friend choked between a sigh and a smile.

"O, Lute, Lute!" she murmured, "you baby, you spoiled baby!"

"I'm pretty hard worked for a spoiled baby," she said complacently.

Marie's eyes narrowed suddenly. She drew a deep breath.

"You are, indeed," she replied, "and you're showing it. Do you realize, Lutie, that you are thirty-one and that you look thirty-six?"

"Always did, thanks."

"N-no, not this way. You're settling. Do you realize that Max is thirty-five and looks thirty?"

"Oh, rot!"

"Just as you like, my dear—it's your funeral."

Lucia squirmed reflectively on the *chaise-longue.*

"Of course, Max is a man," she began defensively, "and then he takes precious good care of his little self. Tennis twice a week and golf every Saturday—he won't week-end where he can't play, if you please!—and he goes to bed at ten, if he's operating the next morning. That sort of thing's all very well, if you can do it, but I can't."

"Why not?" Marie asked simply.

"Why not? Are you crazy, Ri-ri? When would I get the time, pray?"

"You're getting too fat. You'll have to take the time, pretty soon."

"There it is, again," and Lucia's tone grew regretful, "I simply must have my lunch—I go all to pieces. Max doesn't eat it unless he's exercising. No wonder he keeps thin."

"Oh, I'm not going into the reasons. I'm simply suggesting the facts," said Marie calmly. "If you must eat, then take the corresponding exercise, *I* should say."

"All very well," Lucia returned hastily, "but how can I? And anyhow, if I could dance enough, I'd be all right. But then, of course, I don't see so much of Max, he wants to hear music so, and so we go on his account. And all the dancing that's any fun is so late, this year."

"It's a little complicated, certainly," Marie admitted briefly.

"I believe you, it's complicated," Lucia assured her with some warmth. "I simply want you to realize that I *must* be tired at night; Max is, himself."

"Maybe. But he doesn't fall asleep at the table," said Mrs. Fitch drily.

"Well, for heaven's sake, what am I to do, then? Sleep in the afternoon?" Lucia demanded ironically.

"I should suppose you'd have to, under the circumstances," said Marie placidly.

"Don't be an idiot—I think I see myself!"

"You might do worse. I don't think you realize, Lute, how snappish you get, sometimes."

"Why, Marie Fitch!"

"Perhaps not snappish exactly, my dear, but dreadfully brusque and—and *settled.* It makes you older. And of course it's no affair of mine, and we'll drop the subject, if you say so, immediately, but I wonder if Max likes it?"

The tone was so much softer than the words, the look in the older woman's eyes was so unusual, that Lucia swallowed her irritation and spoke more gently than she felt.

"Mattie Forsythe's been talking to you, Ri-ri," she said, "hasn't she?"

"Mattie? No. I haven't seen her for ages."

"Oh! I thought perhaps you had."

Lucia pursed her lips patronizingly.

"You know, since Mattie left the Board," she explained, "she's simply a sort of phonograph: whatever her precious Peter tells her Tuesday night, she tells us Wednesday morning. Since Sister went on the Junior Committee, I see a little more of her, because of course the mothers have to be perfectly satisfied that their darling children aren't overworked or get their sympathies too much played upon. But father says it's all right (for a wonder!), so Miss Martha Forsythe is treasurer this year, for the kiddies."

"Mattie's children will never be as attractive as she is," Marie commented.

"Oh, I don't know. Sister is bossy, of course, like Peter, but I think the baby's pretty nice. Well, Mattie was wondering how I got through the amount I did.

" 'I simply had to go off, my dear,' she said, 'I found I couldn't do much outside work and keep fresh for Peter, evenings!'

"Now what do you think of that?"

"Well," Marie suggested, her eyes in her lap, "*somebody* has to keep fresh for them—evenings!"

Lucia stared.

"For heaven's sake, why?" she cried. "I can't say that Peter ever troubled to keep fresh for Mat! I've seen him play solitaire hours on end in the library."

"It used to be called 'greeting him with a smile,'" Marie said slowly, "you see, the theory was that he came home tired from battling with the world, and there you were with a rose in your hair."

"Um," Lucia commented, "it doesn't appeal to me, some way. How about you? Suppose *I've* been battling with the world, too?"

"That's just it."

Marie's eyes avoided the younger woman's. "Perhaps the idea was that both of you needn't battle," she said.

Lucia gasped.

"Very pretty, I'm sure," she commented, "but how does it apply, exactly? You mean that I'm to drop quietly out from under all these obligations I've assumed, in order to greet Max with a smile every evening? *Merci!*"

"Oh, I mean nothing!" cried the other, wearily, "nothing at all! You know best, Lucia."

"That's all very well, Ri-ri," and Lute's eyes were

dangerously alight, now, "that's all very well, but you evidently mean that I *don't* know best! I might suggest that you don't seem to have gone into the rose-and-smile business very much, yourself!"

Marie's fingers twisted in her lap, but she met the younger woman's eyes full.

"That's all right, Lucia," she said quietly, as the sudden apology began, "never mind. I'm perfectly good for that, and I realize I brought it on myself. My child, that's why I—I'm so worried about you. You don't suppose I hold myself up—me?"

Her face was a bitter thing to see. "But, Lutie, you must remember one thing. Heaven knows I was tired enough at night—I was a wreck. I never had your strength. But I was fighting for my life—I *had* to work. Ranny utterly refused to support me—except on his own terms. It is doubtful if there was ever a time after the first six months when I shouldn't have been one of three . . ."

"Oh, Ri-ri, never mind—never mind! I'm a brute!"

Lucia's eyes were full of tears.

"No, no. It's no matter. Everybody knew it. And, anyway, he was simply a gambler. He really couldn't help that—it was in his blood. But, everything else aside, I couldn't have tried that way: we were up to our ears in debts—foolish debts—two-thirds of the time. I *had* to 'battle with the world.' And you get very hard at it. But what could I do?"

"Nothing, of course," and Lucia's tones were like ice for Randall Fitch, her eyes soft as gray velvet for her friend.

"And yet, Lutie, and yet . . ."

Marie drove a deep look into those gray velvet depths, a look that hurt them both.

"And yet . . . if I *had* been able to 'go into the rose-and-smile business,' as you say, I've always felt I might have done a lot more for him!"

"But . . . but . . . heavens above, Marie Fitch, why should you? *Why should you?* What's the use? Look where you stand to-day!"

"Oh, yes, I stand. I stand," said Marie dully.

Lucia shook off the depression that crept around them.

"See here, Ri-ri," she began, "we can't talk about this. It's a great exception. Take Betty, instead. Does she 'keep fresh for Walter'? Would anyone dare to suggest such a thing?"

Lucia drew a long breath.

"Betty Girard isn't in our class, Lute," she answered quietly, "she's an artist—and a big one. That she's made good as far as she has is simply marvelous, that's all. With her temperament——"

"Other people have temperaments, I suppose!"

"Yes, indeed—but have they her excuse? You know what Sargent said about her. No matter what Betty might *want* to do, it drives her on—that talent of hers, Lutie—she *has* to exhaust herself. A talent like that drives you—*you* can't drive *it*. Heaven knows, she's tried!"

"Tried? Betty? You don't mean that she ever thought she ought to——"

"I mean that she's tried hard to play the game," said Marie shortly.

"I should say so! Putting up with that sulky brute of a Walter Girard at all is playing the game, if you ask me. He's jealous, and obstinate, and he won't go anywhere or do anything . . . honest to goodness, Marie, if Max was likely to grow anything like that——"

"He isn't," said Marie patiently. "He's quite a different type."

"I should hope so!"

"Oh, there are lots of good points to Walter," and Ranny's wife smiled sadly. "Plenty of women would be lucky to get him, my dear. There's not a man that knows him that doesn't respect him. And I admire Betty more than any woman I ever knew, and I back her to the last ditch—but I doubt if, whoever she married, she could——"

"'Greet him with a smile?'" Lucia broke in impatiently. "Well, for heaven's sake, why should she? As far as that goes, it's *his* business to greet *her!*"

"I wonder! Perhaps it is . . . perhaps it is," said Mrs. Fitch, half to herself. "And yet, would any man—that *she* would marry? We're changing, my dear, we're changing, but . . . *are they?*"

"Why, Ri-ri!"

Lucia gasped at this stroke, shut her eyes, shook her head, and gasped again.

"They've got to, then!" she said at last.

"Ah!"

The older woman sat silent.

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Lutie shot out, exasperated, "why should *anybody* greet *anybody* with a smile, when you come to that! How silly! You do your job, he does his, and you get tired if you want to!"

"But you get tired first, Lucia."

"Well; you can't help that."

"No . . . but he likes to have *somebody* smile . . ."

"Well—what's he going to do about it?" challenged Lucia.

"He's going to find somebody that does," Marie replied.

The room was quite still.

"Oh, I see."

Lucia's smile was chilly. "I see. You're very kind, Marie, but I assure you——"

"Lutie, wait! Before you say any more, wait!"

Marie rose, dragged her fur coat that the quiet maid had left for her over her thin shoulders, and opened the door.

"I must go. But I'm going to tell you something. You're half boys, you girls, nowadays, but I swear you know less about men than we used to! Look here, my child, I'm a woman's woman, now, have been for ten years. I'd had enough of men. But I usedn't to be, Lutie. I understood men better when I was twenty than you ever will—and I'd like to suggest to you again that though girls like you may have changed a whole lot in the last fifteen years, men like Max are pretty much what they were when I was twenty! That's a mere detail, but don't overlook it entirely. As I tell Tina Varnham, *her* vote isn't going to alter Dicky's much!

"Now, listen to me: if you think your case is like mine, you're wrong. Circumstances and my husband's nature forced us apart—and I lost out. Yes, you little donkey, I lost out!"

She breathed hard; her cheeks flamed with crimson spots.

"If you think you can judge by Betty Girard, you deceive yourself, Lute. She's an artist and her husband's a perfectly normal man, and fate forced them apart. She can't change and he won't—so *he* lost out!"

Lucia trembled slightly, she never knew why, for there was no sign, then, of any crisis.

"Men like Ranny, I'm sure, shouldn't marry," Marie rushed on, "and I doubt if women like Betty make a

success of it once in a hundred years. But they always do marry, and then—Walter and I pay for it. I'm a woman, and adaptable, and I make the best of it, pick up the pieces, and go on. Walter's a man, so he balks, and makes himself and everybody around him miserable."

She fixed her sharp, burning eyes on Lucia, huddled in the long chair among the gaudy college cushions.

"But you haven't my excuse nor Betty's," she said. "And let me tell you now that if Max isn't Ranny—neither is he Walter!"

Lucia sank deeper into the pillows.

"Max may like American girls," the unpitying voice pursued her, "but he was born in Europe, himself, and European women may not be such wonders on committees, my dear, but they're no fools when it comes to the Great Game—and it's the greatest game in the world, Lute—as nobody knows like us that have lost it!"

The room was as still as the grave. Neither woman moved, and, as they faced each other, they started slightly, for at the same moment each caught a faint murmur of voices from below that ceased as they listened.

"What—what's that?" Marie whispered, terrified, "who's talking?"

Lucia sprang up.

"Max came up long ago," she answered softly, "wait a moment. I'm going to see."

"Oh, Lutie, don't! Call somebody! The house is all dark—get Joseph, why don't you?"

"Hush! He's out for the night—I let him go. And Max is, too, I'm nearly sure. He almost always goes over to the University Club when I go up early. Wait—I'm not afraid."

Lucia sped softly to the drawer of the big desk, opened it, took out a small blunt-nosed revolver, and passed through the door.

"Stay here," she ordered under her breath.

But Marie, trembling, crept down the stairs behind her, slipping out of her high-heeled shoes.

The stairs were dimly lighted. The murmur of voices flowed on, paused, then began again.

They gained the heavy velvet curtains, soundlessly, breathlessly, and Lucia, whom danger steadied mechanically, peered 'round the fluted folds, the weapon high in her hand. She looked, breathed, looked again, then slowly lowered it.

There, in the circle of rosy light from the one big lamp, sat Betty Girard, dark and glowing against the bright red-velvet chair. Her exquisite arms and shoulders were like ivory-toned marble; under the heavy waves of her hair, black at night, her startling hazel eyes seemed more exotic than by day. She was in green and silver, with one great, crimson velvet rose flaring below her breast.

Max leaned over the chair, alert, yet lazy, amused but intensely interested, Lucia knew, by his eyes.

"It's nearly twelve, child—call me a taxi—oughtn't you?" said Betty.

"Ought I? But why—when this is the first real talk we've had for—for how long is it?"

"Heavens! Don't make me count! But when was that Paris summer, Max?"

"Nineteen—five . . . six. . . . Oh, it was five years ago, Bettchen," he counted, "and the jolliest summer I'd ever had!"

She laughed softly. Lucia felt a strange, toothed grip at her side—what a beautiful woman Betty was! What

"Lucia peered 'round the fluted folds, the weapon high in her hand."

was she doing there? Had Max always looked at her so?

"We were abandoned, weren't we, Max?" she said lightly, "poor Mrs. Betty, with her learned husband studying English property laws in London, and poor Master Max, with his little Nannette studying—what was Nannette studying, in Brussels, Max?"

Max blushed—almost—and laughed softly.

"Oh, *la jeunesse!*" he said.

Lucia felt her side, where that toothed ache lingered. Nannette? Who was that?

"I told Walter to call for me, but it's ten to one he's forgotten," said Betty. "Call a taxi, will you, dear boy?"

Dear boy! And yet Lucia had heard Betty say that to many, before this.

"Well, Bettchen, it was too kind of you to enliven my solitude—if you won't wait. I'll take you home."

"Child! I'm forty-one. Don't bother."

"And forty-one times more dangerous than you ever were, madam! You know you've never changed a hair——"

Lucia took the hand behind her.

"Come!" she formed with her lips, and the two women slipped up the silent stairs.

Marie looked curiously at her.

"What are you doing?" she whispered, though the door was closed.

"Changing," said Lucia briefly. With one motion she twisted her rope of hair high on her head, with another she pulled it out above her ears. From the closet she dragged down a smoke-colored tea gown of velvet, frothed with heavy Venetian lace. It slipped over her head and her cheeks, burning, flamed above it. She dusted powder on them and pulled clocked amber stockings over her feet and amber satin high-heeled *mules*

over the webby silk. Behind the great coil of her hair she thrust a carved amber comb from her tortoise-shell tray.

"Will I do?" she asked.

"Stunning," said Marie.

"Then, come on!" said Lucia.

They stood in the door. Neither Betty nor her host had moved, it seemed.

"Why, Lucia! How jolly!"

Max walked quickly over, as Betty spoke.

"I thought you were in bed, madame," he said, "welcome to our city!"

"Nobody told me you were here, Betty—how nice to see you!" and Lucia took both of Betty's lovely hands.

"No—Joseph said you were not to be disturbed, so Max took pity on me till Walter should come. He's at a directors' meeting, but I fear he's forgotten me. How gorgeous you look, Lutie!"

"But I thought you were tired to death, child," Max murmured to her, while Betty and Marie talked together.

"I had a rest," she said, and turned her eyes on his. He took her hand.

"You look it," he said.

"If this is the way you look when you're tired, Lucia," Betty began, "keep on working! Come on nome, Marie."

"Oh, wait," and Lucia held her hands out pleadingly, "Max isn't a bit sleepy, I know. Let's have some bridge, and then telephone for Walter! Won't you?"

"Anything you say," and her husband looked wonderingly at her crimson cheeks.

"But won't you be tired, dear?"

"I can rest to-morrow," she said softly, 'when—when you're not here!"

THE TRY-OUT

Still he looked at her, and Marie Fitch, catching that look, coughed and bit her lip.

"Thank heaven!" she whispered.

"Is heaven still on the job?" said Betty Girard.

CHAPTER XVII

Dr. Stanchon Takes a Temperature

MORE than once, in the two years that followed, did Ri-ri have occasion to recall that somewhat bitter little query. She said afterward that she rarely saw either Lucia or Betty without thinking it. And yet, except, perhaps, to Doctor Stanchon, whose quiet, searching eyes met hers sometimes, "like a Roman augur's," as she put it, there seemed no reason for her uneasiness.

Lucia, with her quick, incisive method of adjusting herself to life as she saw it, soon learned, apparently, the art of minimizing her office work to the point of escaping the fatigue limit, and Max rarely found anything but a freshly gowned, smooth-locked *vis-à-vis* at his dinner-table. To have expected any other topic but prison-reform, at least on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, would have been equivalent to a confession of utter ignorance of his wife's character, and Doctor Fettauer smilingly acknowledged this and endured Sing Sing with his soup, Blackwell's Island with the roast, and the Bedford Reformatory with Joseph's wondrous salad; but from Lucia's point of view, a weekly Philharmonic Concert and string-quartette more than balanced this infliction, and if their conversations grew less frequent, and the silence of the concert-room alternated with the friendly chatter of a crowded dinner-table, why, that was no more than the case with many a busy modern couple.

DOCTOR TAKES A TEMPERATURE

"You never seem to think of Max and Lutie as 'young married people,'" Tina Varnham said. "They seem to settle down with 'the crowd,' and I forget they're not as old as the rest of us!"

Even the Fettauer baby, which (for Lucia called her 'it' for an alarming length of time) arrived at precisely the conventional fortnight before her mother's first wedding anniversary, failed, curiously enough, to set Lutie apart from her friends, with their boys and girls of almost another generation. Her superb constitution and active life carried her triumphantly past the various languors and crises of less fortunate young matrons, and her utter lack of sentimentality or self-consciousness was the amazement of her friends. Even Marie was distinctly surprised at the equanimity with which she placed herself under the simple restrictions of her two doctors, and the common sense with which she followed what must often have seemed superfluous and annoying suggestions.

"But for heaven's sake, Mattie, why?" she inquired impatiently, once, pushing away Mrs. Forsythe's timid congratulations on her unexpected attitude, "why shouldn't I do as they say? They know more about this job than I do, don't they? I don't want a horrid, sickly baby, do I?"

"No, no, of course not, Lute dear! Only, I shouldn't have thought . . . why, Celestine kept up her riding so late, you know," Mattie replied, vaguely, "and Betty—honestly, Betty Girard drove four-in-hand ten days before Naldreth was born!"

"The more fool she!" commented Mrs. Max Fettauer briefly.

"Of course," said Mattie meekly.

"But it was funny," she explained later to Celestine

Varnham, who was held by a bad outbreak of scarlet fever for weeks in the country, "it was too funny to see Lutie in a boudoir cap and that lovely lace jacket Ri-ri sent her, sitting up in bed, smoking and dictating reports to Miss Ferris, with little Gretchen in that wonderful bassinet in the next room! You'd suppose she'd had babies as long as we have—it was almost uncanny. And, of course, not nursing her but a month gives Lute lots of time. She's got a treasure of a nurse, Tina. And Gretchen is just a perfect baby, and never cries nor has indigestion nor—nor anything."

"Oh, Lute's luck, of course!" said Tina.

In the baby's second summer of placid existence, her mother and father shocked Mrs. Peter still further by leaving the young lady with an adoring grandfather and the ex-head-nurse of a famous baby hospital, and going to Germany to the golden wedding celebration of Herr Fettauer, the elder. Lucia delved into Austrian prisons during this vacation, and her husband drank in enough music at Dresden and Bayreuth to tide him over the next American interval; and as he could hardly be expected to assist in her penological researches, and as it would have been "cruelty to animals" in his wife's phrase, "to drag her to those awful Wagner shows" (Lucia's attitude of martyrdom to what are known in her native city as "the dark operas" was only too sincere) no one could have been surprised at the separation almost necessarily involved in their holiday.

"A vacation is one thing: going to Bayreuth with Max Fettauer is another!" as his wife put it.

With Lucia out of the way, Marie Fitch turned her attention to Betty, and was not altogether satisfied with the results of the operation. Always baffling, Mrs. Girard seemed to her friends more than ever complex and vari-

able. A shade less trenchant and satiric than usual, a new softness and a certain new appeal, that affected women quite as much as men, made her more dangerous than ever.

"I've seen her this way once before," Marie confided to Celestine, before her hostess's summer-clean fireplace, "and I don't mind telling you, Tina, I was worried. Walter was more gloomy and solitary than ever, that winter, and one night when Lutie and I were talking up in Lute's room, we came downstairs suddenly and there was Max perched on Betty's chair and she was too handsome for any use, my dear! You know, Max knew her in Germany—before he knew Lucia, for that matter."

"Um. Betty knew everybody, somewhere, once," Celestine commented drily. "But I didn't know about that. Well, there's no use worrying. When she gets those streaks, she gets 'em, that's all. Where are the men—d'you know?"

Peter Forsythe and Dick Varnham were messing happily in the sun over the new Hawkfield swimming pool.

"In about two minutes," said Dicky Varnham resolutely, "there'll be one more dead Dago; this concrete's setting already."

"For heaven's sake!" Peter replied helpfully, "can't we yell at 'em or something?"

"You can yell," his host agreed, with some bitterness, "but unless you can yell in Sicilian, there's nothing doing. —Hi, there, Angelo, get busy, can't you? This damn stuff's gettin' hard!"

A swarthy group, midway down the hill, waved, bowed, and smiled; their teeth flashed in the sun. Dicky beckoned furiously.

"Come on! Come *on!*" he called.

The laborers smiled again and bent to their mysterious

mixing; they appeared to be stirring and flavoring a huge witches' brew.

"There! What'd I tell you?" Dick snorted. "It would take Caruso to budge 'em! By George, I believe I'll hire some of that opera squad for the summer! Nancy, for the love of Mike, hop down and kick 'em up here, will you?"

Nancy Varnham unfolded her long legs amiably and dropped her book.

"If my hair was down, I *would* kick them, Pater," she said seriously, "but you don't kick men, with your hair done up. . . . In songs you say, *'O vieni, vieni!'*"

"Well, try it on, then, only hurry! What's 'hurry' in Dago?"

"'Allegretto,' I suppose," she answered, thoughtfully. "Oh! Andy! Andy!"

"Hello!" came back in a rich baritone, and all the laborers lifted their caps politely.

"Vieni, vieni!"

They laughed delightedly.

"Si, si!" they called, and started up the hill.

"And do it allegretto, please!" she shrilled excitedly, dropping the singing voice of a young lady for the frank yell of a sixteen-year-old tomboy, *"Allegretto! allegretto!"*

"That's the stuff! *Allegretto, allegretto!*" her father bellowed, and Peter joined in happily with a bass that had made his college glee club famous, *"Allegretto, allegretto!"*

"Sounds like some kind of candy to me," said Dick, mopping his dripping forehead, "but it seems to do the job. Know any more, Nance? You'll pay for your board, yet!"

The Italians fell upon a pile of great cobble-stones and began to fit them deftly into the stiffening concrete.

Dick regarded them critically, fanning himself with a linen tennis hat.

"It's a queer thing," he observed, "but when *they* slam those rocks in, they look as if they'd grown there: when *I* try it, you'd think it was a German aquarium! I wonder why?"

"Used. to it, I s'pose," said Peter, lighting his pipe and stretching himself lazily under a big box clump.

"Romans always had baths," Nancy suggested instructively, "so I suppose Italians know how to make swimming pools. Will you really make it deep enough for a dive, Pater?"

"Twelve feet," said Dick. "You can dive in that, if you can dive in anything."

"This'll be bigger than the Girards', won't it, Dick?" Peter inquired idly.

"Gracious, yes, won't it, father? Theirs is only forty feet—ours is sixty. But theirs is more even and square, and they have a sort of marble wall all around it and bay trees for every corner. Can't we have bay trees, father?"

"Oh, Lord, no! This is a different style altogether—more rustic. It's a full third bigger, and I'll bet you it costs a third less. That's a regular molded edge of theirs—Betty offered me the molds, but I refused 'em."

"Aren't they spending a lot this season? Girard said something about a shower, off the tennis court."

"*She's* spending a lot," Dick corrected.

"Aunt Bet made that pool," said Nancy promptly. "Lucia Fettauer wrote mother it was her alimony pool."

"For heaven's sake—what do you—are you crazy, Pussy? Don't talk that way!"

"I am only repeating what Lucia remarked," said Nancy icily.

the Varnhams' cold frame lettuce-hearts and teased Celestine for failing to grow the salad-oil; they devoured the Varnhams' rhubarb tart, dripping in Varnham cream, in appreciative silence.

Nancy, her braids bound demurely about her sleek head, whispered momentous confidences to Cynthia Girard, who had signally failed to inherit her gifted mother's brains or good looks, but presented at fifteen a very charming reflection of her father's quiet tact and good nature. Betty's eyes, unlike her hostess's, scarcely rested on her daughter. Celestine's quick, nervous glance fluttered from the clock to Nancy's table manners, to the service of the luncheon, to the gardener, eternally mowing the rich green outside, to the silver tablets by her plate; but Betty Girard, though she had personally administered a country estate from the day when Celestine lay under the heel of a tyrannous "superintendent," listened to her friend's economic pronouncements with the polite detachment of a Washington Square cockney.

Though her daughter's training had been the pattern for many a mother with less excuse than a busy artist might claim for neglecting such domestic ties, she seemed as far from Celestine's adolescent problems as any slightly bored maiden aunt. Perfectly dressed, in the latest mode of French Revolution collars, Turkish seraglio skirts, a hat that subtly hinted at the latest European war-shadow, and buckled shoes of *marquise* flavor, her charm of personality and ripe physical beauty actually made of this sartorial mixture an esthetic whole.

"Artists almost always wear kimono sort of clothes and do strange things with their hair," said Marie Fitch, of the sharp tongue and kindly deed, "but Betty pays her *corsetière* more than I will!"

She was forty-one. But only in his chisel, as he soft-

ened and dulled the padding surfaces of her cheeks, had the remorseless sculptor, Time, betrayed a fellow artist. The long line from cheek-bone to chin had blurred and sunken here and there; and from her fine nostril to the upturning corners of her flexible mouth a fold of flesh that had once been intermittent had come perilously near to settling. But her throat was the envy of her friends, and, in a season of bizarre jewels and imitation pearls, the melting curves of her shoulder and upper arm, bare as any débutante's, and incalculably more alluring, turned her neighbors' gems to gewgaws.

"Betty makes a bank president's wife look as if she had strings of coupons around her neck," said Marie. And the bank president to whom the *mot* had been repeated had bitten his lip and replied, "And little Fitch is right, damn it!"

Her eyes, which were large and heavy-lidded, were always expected, because her hair and skin were richly brown, to follow their natural type; and her husband has been quoted as admitting that he supposed them to be brown when he married her. But, as a matter of fact, they were grayish hazel with a golden-flecked iris, though most of her sitters will deny this, and assure you that they stared straight at her for hours, while she was painting them, and ought to know!

Her extraordinary detachment from the people and things which might be supposed to hold her interest was the continual marvel of her friends, who had become convinced, after many years of scepticism, that it was not a pose.

"If Betty poses at all," said Marie Fitch, "which I'm beginning to doubt, it's when she practices the ordinary relationships—not when she forgets them!"

To-day she seemed to have forgotten most of them.

Even for her favorite Doctor Stanchon she had only a perfunctory smile, and the flippant replies she vouchsafed to the adoring young art student by her side, who had lain awake half the night with the excitement of meeting her to-day, reduced the poor young man to a dumb confusion.

"And she did the 'Girl with the Green Parrot'!" thought Bobby DuLong in amazement, "and the *'Portrait of Little Miss Abercrombie'!"*

"Mrs. Girard doesn't look well to-day," said Peter to Doctor Stanchon.

"You've noticed it? I doubt if the rest do. She's working too hard, I'm afraid."

"Oh—women!" said Peter.

"That's it. Still, she has a magnificent physique."

"Nice looking girl she has—growing up, aren't they?"

"Wait till you marry 'em off, my young friend," returned the doctor ruefully, *"then* you begin to get some idea! Yes, Cynthia's a nice child. She's no more like her mother than as if they'd picked each other up on the street, though." He walked over to Betty, coffee-cup in hand.

She stood by the piano, one elbow on a blue Chinese robe that covered it, her eyes drifting over its lovely surface, and lifting occasionally to meet the tall boy's, that never left her mobile face.

"How could I have thought her flippant? She's wonderful!" shone in his adoring glance, and her own face lighted as she basked in him.

"Now go and play with the children," she told him, as Stanchon approached, and with a little shrug he obeyed her, and she faced her physician defiantly.

"Well?" she said.

"Not very well, I'm afraid, my dear—is it?"

DOCTOR TAKES A TEMPERATURE

"Only tired—that's all."

"You haven't been to see me of late, though?"

"No time. And, anyway, there must be a limit to even your patience!"

"None, my dear child, where you are concerned."

"You're sweet," she said gratefully, but she did not meet his eyes.

"You've been working hard?" he asked.

"On the contrary. I haven't touched a canvas for two months."

"Any plans for the summer?"

"Oh, no; we'll stay in this country, I suppose. Walter has the whole Leydendecker estate to settle, and expects to work all summer at it, I believe."

"Ah . . . he's very busy these days, isn't he?"

She shrugged one shoulder—a curious little foreign gesture that became her wonderfully.

"That's the law, isn't it? Either you're worried because you haven't enough to do—or because you have too much!"

"It's any profession, my dear girl. I used to shudder if my office bell didn't ring, and now I shudder if it does."

"I suppose so."

Her voice dropped wearily.

"But then, Doctor Stanchon, how very much all over it will all be in a hundred years or so, won't it? I wonder what one would most have wanted to do—then!"

"Do it now," he said promptly.

She started violently.

"What a thing to say!"

"I repeat it: do it now," he said gravely.

"You're like those mottoes they frame in mission-oak

and hang over desks," she began, a little unsteadily, but he refused to smile.

"Look at me, Betty," said he, and she raised her eyes simply to his and met them through a bright film of tears.

"Take a year, my dear, and then—come back!" he said quietly. "I'll see you through."

"Are you mad, Dick Stanchon?"

She spoke through closed teeth and laid one hand on his arm: with him, as with the boy, just now, the years between them faded out, and they were of one age, though he was nearly sixty.

"Well, what are you advising me to do, exactly?" she asked, waving her hand lightly to Nancy, who adored her.

"I am advising you to go abroad," he replied, "go to France and paint; go to Italy for the summer, after the tourists have left; go to—Oh, wherever you went ten years ago; it doesn't matter."

"Alone?"

"Not unless you wish. Take the children, and drop them in Switzerland, for languages. Send the boy to Max: he'll put him with his father in Neustadt, and Lutie will bring him home when they come. It's a golden wedding trip, to show Lucia again to his father and all the other German in-laws, you know."

"Lucia was very daring, wasn't she?"

"To have married a foreigner, you mean? I don't know: as a matter of fact, the international marriages that I know about personally have all turned out very well. About duchesses—I don't pretend to say. But Max is of my own trade, and Lutie hadn't enough to tempt a fortune-hunter."

"I know . . . still——"

DOCTOR TAKES A TEMPERATURE

"You think she was daring? Well, perhaps so. For that matter——"

"Yes, of course. *Any* marriage is daring, Dick."

Why it was that she, of all the women of her age and social circle, called him, when alone with him, by his first name, neither of them knew; it was one of the many things that set her apart from others.

"You're making it daring, Betty, you self-supporting ladies!"

"Do you think that's it? Really, Dick?" Her light voice, her troubled eyes, touched him strangely.

"I'm beginning to think so," he said slowly. "The old rules are breaking up. And we haven't the new ones formulated yet."

"And yet there have always been self-supporting ladies."

"Yes, my dear, but with a difference—with a difference! There have always been actresses and dancers and opera singers, for instance. If they are at all successful, it has always paid their husbands to become their business managers—or is it that their business managers always become their husbands? They are frankly meteoric. They go out to dinner, these days, more than they used to, but that's not because they've changed so much—the change is in their hosts and hostesses!"

"I believe that's so," she agreed.

"Then there are the ladies whose husbands are ill or lazy or vicious or absent: they've always been self-supporting—they've always had to be."

"Of course."

"Then there is the working wife of the laboring class: she's always worked and her children have always worked—there's nothing new about her. And she's always, or almost always, the actual head of the house.

So is the lady with the sickly or neglectful husband I mentioned before—but does either of them admit it? Never. Their dearest fiction is that 'He' is the real lord of the manor, though temporarily obscured by circumstances. That is to say, their attitude would satisfy the cave-man himself, and there's no trouble. As to the opera-singer, either her agent-husband is proud of her 'temperament' and follows meekly in her wake, or he has a temperament of his own, and it becomes a simple endurance test. The working woman and the stage woman have existed, practically, since the flood—and probably before. And neither of them is of the class that makes history, though one underlies it and the other shoots across it."

"She certainly shoots across," said Betty. "You've heard about Ranny Fitch's latest, I suppose?"

"He's an ass," returned the doctor briefly. "And yet, my dear, Ranny—as you call him—is a perfectly typical male, to this extent: if you should say to him, 'Look, there goes the woman that dug the Panama Canal!' he'd only grunt. But if you said 'Look! there's Sarah Bernhardt!' he'd turn around on the subway steps to see her!"

"Oh, dear!" she cried, half laughing, half angry, "how can you all be so silly? For I suppose you'd turn around, too?"

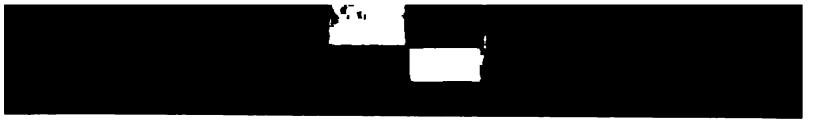
"I suppose I should," he admitted.

"But why? In heaven's name, why?"

"The glamour, my dear," he said, "only the glamour of the footlights. As long as man has a foot and the stage has lights, you will find us running after them as birds beat against a lighthouse."

"But you don't feel so about the other arts?"

"Not at all. They are gulfs apart. A writing woman



or a painting woman is no more like an acting woman than she is like a school teacher or a housekeeper. That is the mistake most people make. The actress has no more influence now than she ever had. In fact, Melba and Caruso together will probably bulk lighter than Patti, fifty years from now. But you professional women who have gained a public without becoming public property, who are at once independent and domestic, who can send your works to represent you—you come nearer to eating your cake and having it, too, than any class of women has ever come. And you are growing every day. And you are growing more conscious of it every day. But—" he paused and looked meaningly at her, "no one in this world, my dear—or in any other, I believe—ever *quite* ate his cake and had it, too!"

"Or her cake, either?"

"Or her cake, most assuredly. *More* assuredly, if that were possible!"

"So it seems," said Betty Girard, slowly, "so it seems, philosopher and friend!"

They looked at each other and then away. To the curious roomful, watching them more or less covertly, their relationship was unguessable.

"Is Betty consulting him or—enchanting him?" said Celestine impertinently. "I wonder!"

"Both, maybe," suggested her husband interestedly. "She's up to anything, Betty."

"Doctor Stanchon's crazy about Betty," Nancy remarked, "always was."

"Hush your nonsense, Nance!" Dicky cried impatiently. "You talk like a Victor phonograph!"

"We're going for a tramp," said Betty shortly. "You stare at us so it makes us nervous. Wait for me, Doctor Stanchon, till I change these things."

Stanchon smiled good humoredly at them and punched Dicky as he passed by him.

"How does it feel when they begin to grow up, Dicky? Wait till she begins to march in parades, and writes to the papers, and tells you she's a socialist!"

"Yes, I'll wait, all right," Dicky assured him grimly, "you watch me!"

"Or it may be worse yet," the doctor pursued instructively. "The daughter of one of my patients insisted on doing barefoot dances all last winter for charity, in all the hotel ball-rooms of New York, and just as her father decided that he'd lock her in her room if she did it any more, she took to Anglican Catholic lectures and early communion services (masses, she called 'em) and founded a sisterhood, where they all promised never to marry!"

"For the love of Mike!" Dicky gasped, glancing involuntarily and fearfully at his daughter, pacing entwined and giggling with the sedate Cynthia along the tiled veranda. "Aren't there any asylums you can put 'em in while they're growing?"

"There are," Doctor Stanchon answered promptly, "there are, indeed, Dicky, my boy, plenty of them."

"Could you give a poor devil the addresses of a few?"

"With pleasure. But one will do your job pretty thoroughly: write it down."

Dicky stared at him, quite serious.

"It's called 'Hawkfield,' situated on a fine, healthful ridge in the heart of Westchester County," Doctor Stanchon went on, easily, "the country residence of Richard D. Varnham, Esq. I recommend it heartily for your daughter, Mr. Varnham, and I assure you that there are as many asylums for the rising generation to-day as there are—homes. Precisely."

DOCTOR TAKES A TEMPERATURE

With his last sentence his eyes met Betty Girard's, who stood silently in the door, staring at him fixedly.

"Got you there, Dicky! Old Doctor Stanchon got you there!" cried Peter Forsythe, who admired the doctor beyond words. They all laughed, but Betty still stood staring. She looked even younger than before, in her trim, tailored skirt, high laced boots and jaunty open-throated blouse with a flowing, scarlet scarf knotted loosely. A little rough cloth hat with a scarlet quill thrust through the side framed her dark hair with a charmingly school-girlish effect; a Great Dane, fiercely brindled, thrust his heavy jowl under her hand where the sapphire and emerald ring shot peacock flames.

She addressed him across the room, utterly unconscious of the others.

"My dear man, that's a beautiful idea, but will it really bear analysis? I got a hundred day-old chicks (incubator-bred, of course) last month, and from the day they came to us they've outclassed those we raise ourselves, born the same day, in weight, height, and strength! And as for cleverness—there's no comparison. After a week of training, they tumble into their boxes, and cuddle down among the old newspapers and burlap, and are off to sleep before the old mother hen in the corner of the chicken yard has got her dozen together under the maternal wing!"

"There you are! Go it, Betty!" Dicky cried delightedly. "Hand him another! What've you got to say to that, Stanchon?"

"Merely that it's very interesting and I don't doubt it for a minute: I don't know anything about chickens," said the doctor.

"Ah, that's a scientist!" Betty complained scornfully. "Every time! Tell them anything about yourself, and

they begin to explain that it can't be so, because they did something to a guinea pig! But take a leaf out of their book, and confide to them your own discoveries in the chicken yard, and they tell you scornfully that they're not interested in animals! Pooh!"

"That's it," Dicky agreed, rubbing his hands, "that's it exactly. Pooh! That's just what I say—pooh!"

"You're an idiot," said Stanchon, laughing, "if there ever was one! Don't let me keep you, Madame Betty," and he joined her at the door.

"To think that she's forty years old!" Nancy breathed adoringly. She had followed her divinity across the broad hall, pawing her scarlet tie in ecstasies which Betty patiently endured.

"George! She certainly gets away with it!" Dicky agreed. "Come back here, Nance, will you? (You're not asked to that party, you little donkey.)"

"Father! She said I might walk to the cottage with them—truly she did!"

"Well, you won't, that's all. Now, trot along."

"She told me herself she was forty-one," Bobby Du-Long murmured. "It doesn't seem possible, does it?"

"Oh, nobody looks forty-one, nowadays," said Celestine carelessly, "it isn't done. And dark women always look well in sporting things—if they have any figure at all. Are you driving down for Mattie, Peter, or shall I send? It's the 3:46."

"I'll drive, thanks. Is Girard to be on that?"

"Walter? I doubt if he's coming at all. Betty hardly expects him. He says if he's to go into the country at all, he'd rather be on his own place. You know what Walter is. You can't do a thing with him: he just wants to fuss around by himself, nowadays. It's terribly hard for Betty. He'll walk out, if he decides to come."

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"I see," and Peter took out his watch.

"I thought we were going to get in some golf, Peter," said Dicky a little discontentedly, "couldn't somebody else go for your missis?"

"They could, but they won't, thanks, Dicky," Peter replied placidly. "I'll get over to the club later, all right. I told her I'd meet her."

"I know, but——"

"You're worse than Stafford Varnham, Dicky," Celestine interposed, turning disgusted eyes on her husband. "Let Peter alone, can't you? You'd better get after those Italians, and then go over to the club together. There'll be plenty of time: we won't dine till eight."

Dicky retired, murmuring something indistinguishable about honeymoons and tin-weddings, and Peter strolled imperturbably to the stable. His hostess, relieved at once of her guests and family, bustled into the famous "office" of Hawkfield Farm, and applied herself to a mysterious system of spindles and vouchers, understood by nobody but herself, but reverentially admired by all. Nancy Varnham and Cynthia Girard started a desultory game of tennis with young DuLong, which soon relapsed into a comfortable pretense of activity in training a Great Dane puppy to retrieve tennis balls.

Later, the puppy having pursued his course of instruction not wisely but too well, which method led him through some very undesirable heaps of fertilizing material, his young mistress decided it was high time all the dogs had a good wash and they'd better get at it directly. An unsuspecting and correspondingly indignant young stable-hand was routed out of the harness-room, a tin of strong smelling soap procured, the unhappy animal tied to a tree and lathered violently. After Cynthia and Bobby DuLong had been more or less thor-

oughly soused with rinsing water and the stable boy well smeared with the liquid soap, the harassed beast, smarting from the thorough washing of his eyes, earnestly recommended by Miss Varnham, slipped his glistening head out of the collar, and, with a convulsive shudder which sprayed her from head to foot, dashed furiously for the woods, dripping like a seal.

They pursued him, shrieking, for a moment, but, on the advice of the soapy stable boy, returned, and lay panting in the sun to dry.

"He's gone after his mother, I bet you," said the boy sulkily. "You'd never ketch him in a week. She went off over that way with the lady and gen'l'man."

And he was quite right, for the insulted puppy, damp and determined, cannoned into Betty and the doctor and all but knocked them over, to his mother's polite regret, as she paced gravely at the lady's left.

"Ugh—you're wet! Get out!" Betty cried, laughing. "See, doctor, they've been washing him, and he escaped! Fricka, teach your son better manners, why don't you?"

"That's odd," said Stanchon reflectively. "Do you know, I was just thinking of dog washing, child?"

"Thought transference," she returned lightly. "Why were you? What dog?"

"Yours," he said. "The first time I ever saw you, Betty, you were washing your dogs—do you remember?"

"No. Really? How amusing!"

"When was it?" he went on thoughtfully. "Fifteen years ago? About that, I imagine. You were Miss Naldreth, then. You were just engaged. Peter Forsythe was just married, and he and Mattie had dropped in to take me off in their motor—motors were new toys then, you know, and it was a treat to get off in one.

" 'Let's go up to Miss Naldreth's farm—wouldn't you

like to meet her, doctor?' Mattie said. 'She's the most interesting girl I ever met. You know who she is, don't you?'

"'The girl that does those clever double-page things in *Life*?' said I. 'Yes, I'd like to. She has tremendous talent. Draws like a man. Cleverer than Gibson, *I* think.'

"'She's engaged to Walter Girard, you know,' says Mattie, 'a sort of second-cousin of mine. Though what she sees in him I don't know, I'm sure. He's the last person I should suppose a girl like that would marry.'"

"I know. Everybody thought that," said Betty quietly.

They walked on a soft, pine-needled path, close and friendly and all alone in the world, but for the two dogs.

"And so we got to that little farm house up in the Connecticut hills," he went on, musing. "I fell in love with it, on sight. I can see it now, long and low and latticed, all rag rugs and quaint old furniture and blue china and camel's-hair shawls. And your garden—sweet peas and cabbages all jumbled together: you used to say that the pinks and purples were the most beautiful combination in nature. Do you remember?"

"Yes," she said briefly, "I remember, Dick."

"I thought you'd have been more what we call 'artistic,'" he said, smiling. "Queer clothes, you know, and lanky. A 'greenery, yallery, Grosvenor gallery' young woman. And when we saw you—I wish I'd had a kodak with me, Betty! I shall never forget you as you were that day, never!"

She laughed, now.

"Oh, yes, I remember," she said, "how you all roared at me!"

"And why shouldn't we?" he demanded. "If you saw a handsome gypsy of a girl in a business-like corduroy

suit, with a kitchen apron around her waist, a blue and white check sun-bonnet on her head, silk stockings, and high-heeled, buckled, bright red slippers on her feet, washing two dogs as big as young heifers, and singing hymns at the top of her voice—wouldn't you roar?"

"I always sing hymns when I'm busy," she explained defensively, "and high heels are much more comfortable for me, as a matter of fact. At least, they used to be. Like everything else, my feet are giving way with years."

"Nonsense," said he, "you look younger than you did two years ago."

"Well, go on," she said hastily, "what happened then?"

"Why, we stayed to luncheon," he replied reflectively, "and you made your famous mixed vegetable salad, and sang Paris street songs to the guitar, and showed us your prize-competition sketches, and were very clever and amusing generally. And when we went away, dear little Mattie said she'd rather be you than any woman she knew—and Peter and I looked at each other."

"Oh! Peter and you looked at each other, did you? Meaning——?"

"Meaning that we were glad she *wasn't* you, my dear," he said quietly.

"I should think so!"

"Peter meaning that you struck him as a rather dangerous young woman to marry, and I meaning that I had encountered your type of woman before, and thought you a little too clever to be happy. Whereas Martha ——"

"Was a little too happy to be clever—eh?"

"Just so," he answered thoughtfully. "Just so, my dear. And if you're fond of a woman you want her to be happy, naturally."

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"Naturally," she repeated. "And you want me to be happy, don't you, Dick?"

"So much so, dear Betty," he said, "that I would do anything in my power to bring it about."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Contract

THE sun struck through the great flat masses of the pines and the balsam odor sent out puffs and clouds of incense around them.

"Why, Dick Stanchon, I believe you're in love with me!" she cried softly. "Are you, by any chance?"

"I think I am, my dear, in a harmless, friendly way," he said. "Didn't you know it?"

"Sometimes I thought so and then I decided it was nonsense," she answered, breathing quicker. "Oh, Dick, why weren't you, when you came out to the farm that day?"

"Perhaps I was," he said, "and didn't quite realize it. You interested me enormously. But I thought it was because you looked like the first woman I ever loved, and because your voice was like hers. We fall victims to the same type, you know, men. Blondes always look like dolls to me."

She stopped and, facing him, put her hand on his arm.

"Why didn't you, Dick? Why didn't you?" she repeated.

"Because I was twenty years older than you, my dear," he answered; "because you were a restless, brilliant young woman and I was a settled, middle-aged man; because you were engaged to be married to a handsome, successful lawyer, of your own artistic tastes and in-

terests, and hardly likely to be attracted to a widower with a daughter ten years younger than yourself."

"You always seemed young to me," she said thoughtfully. "I always liked older men, you know. You are younger to-day than Walter, essentially."

"My dear girl!"

"I mean," she explained, "your mind is younger, more flexible: Walter hasn't changed since we were married and——"

"Then he's fifteen years younger than the average man of his age, you silly Betty!"

"No . . . you don't see what I mean. You've changed, I've changed, Mattie's changed, why, even poor old Dicky Varnham's changed—but Walter, never!"

"He looks younger than Dicky by five years," said Stanchon.

"I should hope so," she returned quickly. "He's a temperate, sensible man who has always had a steady income: Dicky Varnham's a reformed drunkard and was a plunging stock-broker for years."

Stanchon winced slightly.

"You don't mince your words, do you, Betty?" he asked.

"Why should I?" she said indifferently. "You know all about all of us—what's the use?"

"Your sex 'speaks out in meeting' more plainly than it used, I know," he went on reflectively.

"Bosh, Dick!" she said rudely, "all bosh! My sex has always spoken out—when it had an income of its own! Take your actress, take that poor working woman you were telling me about: haven't they always spoken out? From Dickens to D'Annunzio?"

"Why, yes, I believe they have," he admitted.

"More of them speak out now, because more of them can afford to," she added, "that's all."

"You mean women never were really shy?"

"Shy?" she repeated, and stopped and stared at him, *"shy?* Heavens above, Dick Stanchon! You see us bumped first-hand into every indecent reality of life from birth to death—inclusive—and ask me if we're shy! Disgusted, as we must be; reserved, if we can afford to be; timid, when you want us to be—but shy! And you a doctor!"

He took her hand.

"You're very clever, child," he said sadly. "What is it you want to do? Can I help you?"

"I believe you could have held me," said Betty Girard, "in spite of those twenty years. I believe you could have, Dick, if anyone could!"

"Ah, that's it!" he caught her up quickly, *"if any one could!* Don't you see that's the difficulty, child?"

"I know, I know . . . that's why I've kept quiet so long," she said softly. "I suppose if I wait a few years more, it'll be all over, anyway, and I'll be sorry to have made the fuss?"

She searched his face pathetically.

"Betty, dear child," he replied after a long moment, "I wish I dared tell you so! It's a simple remedy, and you have many resources: it isn't 'woman's whole existence' any more, you see, is it?"

She smiled with the scorn of forty years, but her eyes had no age at all, and he shook his head.

"You see, you're the sort of woman that never grows old," he said slowly. "The real, constructive artist doesn't, in my experience. You're good for any amount of life, yet."

"Then is any amount of life—good for me?"

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She laughed at her *mot,* but he barely spared her a smile.

"Now you've hit it!" he cried. "*Now* we're at the core of the thing, Betty: good for you, how? In what capacity? As an artist, as a female, or as a member of civilized society?"

"Do you mean," she began, but he interrupted her eagerly.

"Because I'll tell you," he said.

"As a productive artist, you cannot have too much of life. That seems certain. As a female, it is doubtful if you can have too much of life, but I think you *can.* That's modern psychology. As a member of civilized society, we all *know* you can have too much of life. That's history and art and religion and horse sense and the Law and the Prophets. Now, make up your mind."

"You mean, which I'll be?"

"I mean, which you'll be," he said firmly. "And make it up thoroughly, my girl, for your art and your sex and the society you live in will take it out of you, if you wobble! Take either of those lines, and Art will support you, or Nature will support you, or Society will support you. We all understand: we're not so stupid as you think! A price for everything, and everything at its price. But slip between the three—and it's thumbs down, all 'round, Betty!"

"I know," she said bitterly, "I know."

"You've got just so much vitality, my dear; where will you put it? Which is your best investment? Pick out your bank and deposit, that's all."

"But Sarah Bernhardt——"

"Ah, yes, and Ellen Terry! What has that to do with you, pray? Are you prepared to pay their price? Whenever a woman becomes the property of the public, if she

has sufficient genius, the public pays her well and gladly for it; she gives them herself—they give her plenty of sugar plums. But the public owns the stage, you know, and nothing will ever persuade them that they don't. They never have owned Strauss or Sargent or Meredith, and never pretended to. There's where you win—and there's where you lose, my dear!"

"You know, I can't work any more," she said abruptly.

"Then don't try."

"But I *must* try!"

"Why?"

"Because I'm restless and nervous if I go too long without it, and because I need money."

"But surely, Betty——"

"Oh, that's all very well," she broke in bluntly, "but, if I take Walter's money, I must do as Walter wants!"

"Dear me," he said, "you business women *are* astonishing! You really feel that?"

"I really feel that, yes."

"Then why doesn't the fact that you practically support yourself leave you free to do as you want?"

She stopped abruptly and met his eyes.

"That's just what I don't know, Dick," she said frankly, *"but it doesn't.* If it did, I'd be in Italy to-day."

"You wouldn't miss him?"

She smiled gently and shook her head.

"You miss what you depend on and what depends on you," she said. "I never depended on Walter, and I could never have cared for a man who depended on me. So when I ceased to care . . ."

"The average husband, you know," said Stanchon, "is his wife's oldest child. That keeps her going when the springs slacken."

"I know. One reads about it," she answered indifferently, "it always seemed rather grotesque to me."

"That's because you never grow up," he said quickly.

"And yet I shall grow old. . . ."

"Ah, yes—that's different, dear."

"A sort of old baby, in short?"

"An artist, Betty."

"See here, Dick, do you really believe that they oughtn't to marry—that sort—and all the rest of the old stuff?"

"I didn't use to, Betty—so long as you kept above water," he said slowly. "I always said you'd driven a nail into that theory. But if you haven't—why, it's only one more, that's all."

"Only one more," she echoed listlessly. "Let's sit down, will you, Dick?"

She dropped lightly down on a flat, warm rock; he sat, cross-legged like a college-boy, beside her.

"You sit like a girl," he said, "and you look like one, for the matter of that. Do you really know what you want, my poor Betty? Of course *I* know—but do you?"

She met his eyes unflinchingly.

"Of course I do," she said.

"Oh, well, if you know," and his eyes narrowed thoughtfully, "then that's all."

"I want the old thrill, Dick," she began suddenly, her voice quite soft and colorless, her eyes vaguely fixed ahead of her.

"I don't want to be wanted: I want to *want!*"

He patted her hand gently.

"I know, I know," he murmured.

"I don't want to hurt anybody," she went on monotonously, "I don't want to make any great row. But I

don't believe it would hurt anybody, Dick! Can't it ever be managed?"

"Dear child," he said evenly, "as a conventional moralist, I ought to tell you, no. As a well-qualified observer, I am obliged to assure you that it sometimes can."

"I despise a bolting woman," she said abruptly.

He nodded.

"Of course you would," he agreed.

"I never could see why the whole fabric of a family—an establishment, land, a position, children, the whole roots of the future generation—should be torn up and scattered to the winds, because the one emotion that led us into it has died away."

"The trouble is," he corrected gently, "it doesn't die away; it only dies away in one direction!"

"Then why doesn't the capacity die, Dick?"

"Aha! That's the question. A lot of trouble would be saved in this old world if it did, my dear!"

"Then it's badly managed!"

"Very badly, my child, for the individual. But Nature has never been interested in the individual. He emerges, almost, in spite of her. What she has terribly on her inexorable old mind is the type, the human species—and, sooner than lose that, she practically overdoes the business. She is the first of the anarchists, that old lady, and if she overcharges every bomb, and you complain that less dynamite would have answered her purpose in any specific case, she will only tell you that in her laboratory dynamite is cheap, and that she can't afford to take any chances!"

"But that's using a steam-hammer to crush an egg-shell. . . ."

"Precisely. But the Old Lady works in greatest-common-denominators, Betty. She is too large to putter

about with details, though it is a favorite fiction of scientists that she is always busy with them. She knows that her own big hammer will crush everything, her own big card will win every game, her own big language will pass every frontier, her own big currency will cancel every account. And with that great tool, the desire to live and create life, she has shaped the race out of the primeval slime, and loosed a force so terrible that the greatest work of civilization has been to harness and standardize it."

"But I can't work harnessed, Dick!"

Her lower lip pouted unreasonably, like a child's; her eyes, almost black with resentment and troubled as he had never seen them, met his, full, and melted into his as only Betty's could. He kissed her, and she cried a little on his shoulder.

"My dear," he said unsteadily, "when you married, I said that no man on earth could hold you for ten years: Walter has done so much better than that, that I began to believe in miracles. You know, of course, that I'm always your friend. If you are one of those that must beat the open sea in order to appreciate the harbor—well! But, Betty, whatever you do, remember the price! You're a grown woman, and you know that everything in the world is listed: it's all written down in the book!"

"If you mean the children," she began stormily, but he patted her against his shoulder firmly.

"I don't mean the children, stupid," he said, "it's only in magazine stories (written by men) that women gaze into the blue eyes of their angelic little ones, and fall weeping by their cribs! As a matter of fact, there's no connection. I believe you to be quite capable of carrying on your excellent development of your little family, however widely you might diverge from the conventional

domestic code. Just as I believe that you would allow no such divergence to interfere for a moment with your relations to your children or your art or your establishment in life generally—*if you could help it.* Am I right?"

"Quite right," she said briefly.

"Just so. Your life is one of many sections, Madame Betty, and no one emotion can flood them all, I believe. Artists and ocean steamers are equipped with water-tight compartments, and——"

"And they don't always work, in either case?" she interrupted maliciously.

He laughed in spite of himself.

"But this is what I mean, my child," he said, "and be sure you understand it. The cleverer the juggler, the greater the number of balls he can keep in the air at once—and the greater the crash, when his eye relaxes and his wrist slips and they all come down. He defies gravity and you may defy conventionality: in either case, the world watches the feat with interest. But when he fails, his audience is more or less indulgent; it is only a matter of picking up the balls and trying again. When *you* fail——"

"Oh, I know, I know," she finished wearily.

"You see, dear," he went on, softly now, and stroking her thick hair tenderly, "you made a contract."

"But, great heavens and earth, how did I know? How could I judge? How can anybody promise——"

"Lie still, child, lie still—I don't speak of your contract with your husband. That seems to have been the best sailing chart we have at present, and insures the least number of obvious shipwrecks in humanity's queer voyage across space and time. But it's going to be very greatly corrected and reinterpreted and lopped away here

and padded out there, and the original sailing masters would hardly recognize it, in a generation more, I think. It's caused a lot of unnecessary agony and martyrdom; and an age that has come to believe in eliminating all such is going to make short work of them—there's too much that has to be. No, no: as to how much longer two people are going to stand up before a third person, and promise to love each other eternally, no thoughtful person wants to commit himself."

"I should hope not!" she muttered resentfully.

"But, mind you, Betty, as long as two persons are all that we have to look to in order to insure the arrival on this planet of two more persons, *some* promise, of *some* kind has got to be made. It's really not a promise to each other: the Church has long and valiantly struggled to make that promise sacred, and the results are not brilliantly promising. Where a relation is really sacred, no law can help or hinder it, and where it isn't, the priest was never born that can make it so."

"I know," she murmured.

"Humanity has universally and of its own free will admitted the sacred character of the bond between mother and child, and no law that breaks that bond has ever really convinced the hearts of men. But the most jealous church in the world has never sought to dispense with the legal sanction of the marriage ceremony. They don't dare trust us, without."

"That's true," Betty admitted, "that's perfectly true."

She leaned back in his arm and watched his face closely. He had always interested her intensely: wherever she thought, he had gone before.

"And here's another thing that's true," he said, looking keenly at her.

"You made a certain contract with society, with civili-

zation at its present stage. You agreed to become one of the body that holds it up, that strengthens the stockade between it and the howling wilderness outside. You were one of the inside coral-workers to enlarge the reef, not one of the waves that beat against it and eat it away from without. And, for that, the reef protected you and your children. Does the reef—society—care tuppence *whom* you married? Not a bit of it: that's romance, fate, a sacred bond, a sentimental bait—whichever your special temperament and nationality and generation incline you to. It only cares *that* you marry. And it cares for stable courts of justice, and good roads, and adequate sanitation, and standardized education for youth. These things have always gone with at least a theoretical monogamy. There are always many exceptions to every rule, but when the exceptions outnumber the rule, then the rule changes."

"And you think it won't change, ever?"

"Well, this special rule has never changed yet. Though some of the greatest natures in the world, though a goodly proportion of the world's greatest benefactors, in fact, have broken it, the world has consistently declared that they were great in spite of their defections, not because of them. And with women society has been, necessarily, super-strict. The race supply, like the water supply, must be beyond suspicion. It isn't what you promised Walter that we care about, my dear. It's what you promised *us!*"

"But you made me promise too much!"

"Well, well: we did the best we could, my dear. You were a sort of necessary luxury—one of those of which Doctor Holmes said that if we could have enough we could dispense with the necessities!—and we protected you and paid for you, and without us, where (and what)

would you have been? Now you are beginning to deal directly with the world, and not necessarily with the world through us, and it is probable that we sha'n't be able to make you promise quite so much, or hold you quite so stiffly to it."

"Ah!" she murmured, "I believe you!"

"But, Betty," and he caught her wrists firmly, "mind that you stand ready to pay! You're a proud woman and you've always met conventional people squarely, if contemptuously.

"'I can play your silly Philistine game, and better than most of you!' you've always boasted. So that you've roused jealousy on every side. Don't expect any grace from either camp, my dear!"

She winced.

"I know—I know," she whispered.

"You are one of the frankest women I ever knew: you can't keep your pride and your frankness both—and both are very dear to you, my child!"

"I know," she repeated.

"Intrigue in itself is far from appealing to you—but such standards as you have set up for yourself cannot be upheld without subterfuge, somewhere."

"I know," and this time her voice was barely audible.

"I am not speaking sentimentally, my child; God knows I'm not throwing old maxims at you. You're too big a woman to settle with a few copy-book phrases. It's very easy to tell other people what not to do. And it's infinitely simpler to keep the social order balanced with a few iron-clad rules than to try to trace out the real system of weights and counter-weights between the single soul and society. St. Theresa's case was simple, compared to her modern sisters'! But, utterly aside from conventional prejudices, remember that even in the widest

interpretation of individualism there is no such thing as a bargain on life's counter! My sex has had free hands much longer than yours, and we've nearly learned that lesson—I sometimes think it's the last illusion you'll consent to lose!"

"I didn't want so very much. . . ." she whispered childishly, clinging to his arm.

He bit his lip, hardening himself to the soft pressure.

"Are you sure?" he asked quietly. "Quite sure, Betty, child?"

She shook her head obstinately.

"Is there anyone you're in love with?" he shot at her, suddenly.

"No."

Prompt and frank, she satisfied him with her very careless simplicity.

"But you want to be a free-lance again? That's all?"

"Every bit, Dick. I shouldn't have married."

"Perhaps not," he agreed, "but you *would* have!"

She gasped at this simple sentence, laughed uncertainly, then sighed.

"Really?" she breathed.

"Really," he assured her, "you're the kind that does. Anyway, you *did*. And so doing, you built up that extraordinary thing—a family—which is not merely you, plus your husband, plus your children; but a definite entity, a something beyond its parts, with a foundation and a personality all its own. And you built yourself into it. And now you can't get away from it."

He felt her sobbing in his arms.

"Why, my dear," he went on evenly, as though her shaken body had not moved him, "that is the one thing that convinces me of the essential necessity of the family: it is the one thing men make, besides their laws and

their religions, that they can't get away from! They invent all these for comfort and security—and they find themselves in a trap!"

She stared at him, her head thrown back on his arm.

"And yet," he mused, "within this triangular trap of religion, law, and the family—civilization grows, and history watches, and art is born!"

She watched him wonderingly.

"You say you don't want much," he said abruptly, "what do you want? To love again? Have you any guarantee that it will last? If not, then do you really wish to pay such a price as freedom entails for a flash in the pan? Or to repeat the experiment indefinitely?"

"O Dick!"

"Very well, then, to trust yourself again, to realize the same disillusionment, the same trap?"

She shook her head.

"Will you steal the experience with a *liason*, or buy it with a divorce?"

She hid her face silently.

"Will you yield to a St. Martin's summer passion for a boy (like DuLong)—which is a certain sorrow; or try again with a man who can understand you (like me)—which is a probable regret?"

"Dick Stanchon, you're cruel. You make everything so hard-and-fast——"

"Whatever happens, child, will be a definite thing—with you, very definite. I can't let you deceive yourself with the idea that all this is a vague theory, a series of eternal possibilities. 'Freedom,' with you, merely means freedom to do what you want: what are you going to want?"

"Nothing . . . *for a while,*" she added, low but honestly.

"Ah! 'For a while,'" he repeated, forcing her to meet his eyes, "and then, Betty? And then?"

She flushed, but braved those piercing eyes.

"At any rate," she began definitely.

"At any rate," he interrupted shortly, "you will begin again to build up precisely the fabric you are now loosening. Remember, you are not a bohemian, Betty. *You will begin to build up again.*"

She rose lightly and brushed the pine needles from her skirt, slipped a tiny powder-puff from its looking-glass case, and carefully dusted her hot cheeks, her whole soul, apparently, in the process.

"Of course you know," she remarked, "that you've disturbed me a hundred times more than by being properly shocked? If I could possibly be more miserable than I was——"

"Some day you'll begin to believe that we weren't entirely selfish, we men, when we tried so hard to keep you from the Arts!" he said, smiling to meet her change of mood, and watching her deft movements as she smoothed her hair and shook her skirts.

"It's hard enough, Betty dear, to be a successful woman and a successful member of society: to combine these achievements with those of a successful artist is more than one has a right to expect of any of you! Not that you don't manage it, now and then, of course."

"You think I could?"

"I think you could do anything on God's earth, Betty—if you wanted to!"

She held out her hands to him.

"Get up," she said, "and come back. As there's no one here to make me think otherwise, of course I see you're right. If there *were*——"

"Here they are! Here, Fricka, here!"

"A glance at Richard Stanchon's strong convulsed face caught and held her."

THE CONTRACT

Up from the ground, apparently, rose Nancy Varnham and Bobby DuLong, the girl's face all frank pleasure at this successful game of hide-and-seek, the young man's eyes half audacious, half timid, as they met Betty's.

"I—we couldn't get along without you, so we came," he said.

"Do you know, that boy has a distinct look of Max," Stanchon said easily. "It's that same dark, clever type. Do you get it?"

She flashed him a quick, questioning glance.

"Oh, yes, I get it," she answered listlessly.

"So we came," the boy repeated, breathless.

"How perfectly jolly!"

A quick flush brightened her eyes and her teeth flashed white. She had a dimple like a girl's.

"Take me home, Bobby—the doctor's been scolding me," she said gaily.

"Let's lose him!"

He had all but seized her offered hand, they were all but away, when a glance at Richard Stanchon's strong, convulsed face caught and held her. She wavered, dared not believe what she read there, then dared not doubt.

"Run along, children, run along," she said gently, and at the sound of her voice they scampered off like frightened rabbits.

She took his clenched hands in her own and forced them gently to her shoulders, so that she stood like a boy before him.

"Dick," she said softly, "dear Dick! you don't mean ——"

"God knows I do!" he groaned. "I—I'm jealous, Betty! If—if you're really going to do it . . . if you're

CHAPTER XIX

The Payroll

FOR heaven's sake!"

Lucia's hands slipped from the wheel and she groaned disgustedly. The runabout settled comfortably into the ditch by the side of the road, and with a final throaty chug subsided into the peaceful silence of the countryside.

"Six cylinders! Bah!" said Lucia. She turned stiffly in her driver's seat and looked behind her—nothing had ever passed that way, apparently; nothing was passing, certainly; nothing would pass, probably.

"Of course, any other time, the road would be thick with 'em!" she muttered irritably. "I can't leave these rugs and the trunk, anyhow."

She clambered down, took off her heavy fur coat, shouldered into a woolly gray sweater-jacket of the latest Biarritz design, and stamped gloomily around the car.

"And I was late for lunch, too!" she moaned.

A tribe of crows sailed lazily across the winter landscape; the bare, stenciled boughs swayed slightly in the light wind; two great branches above her head creaked sadly as they moved.

"Ugh!" she muttered and shrugged her woolly gray shoulders, "this *is* cheerful!"

Suddenly a faint, piping whistle sounded in the distance and a moment later a man's—no, a boy's—figure

topped the slight rise of the nearest hillock in the undulating, rocky pasture to the left. He came nearer at a quick swing; a broad-shouldered fellow, with a freckled face and a cheerful snub nose.

"Hello!" Lucia called.

"Hello!" he called back noncommittally, then, as he swung nearer, "'Bust your car?"

"Carbureter clogged," she returned briefly.

"Oh! Nothin' doin'?"

"Nothin' doin'," she repeated, "can I get to a telephone?"

"Not for a mile, I guess. Where you goin'?"

"Hawkfield—Mrs. Varnham's place. It's more than a mile, isn't it?"

"Not cross-lots. That's how I meant. I just been there."

"Oh, bother!" and Lucia frowned. "Could you go again and have them send some one—I'd be glad to pay you," she added, as he pursed his lips doubtfully. "You see, I can't leave the car—my trunk's in it and that fur coat and the rugs. Perhaps Healy—Mrs. Varnham's man—can start her up for me, or else they'll have to send a team. Or she can telephone to the garage in the village."

"She'll have to," the boy announced shortly, "if you mean Mr. Tom Healy; he's my father, and he's down with Mis' Varnham and Mr. Adler and everybody else, workin' at the pump. She froze and then she bust, and she's leakin' all over the place. They can't spare no one."

"Oh!" said Lucia, "how disgusting!"

"Yep," said Mr. Tom Healy's son, "that's what *she* said. And I came over with m' father's dinner, and, when I got there, he'd had it—with Adler. So I brought

it back, and then I have to stay with the kids, so's my sister can have the afternoon off—after she's got the dinner. Ma's off workin'."

"For heaven's sake! What shall I do, then?" Lucia queried, fatigue and cold drawling in her voice, "not a soul comes by here!"

"Nope. 'S cut-off," said the boy carelessly, "didn't you see the sign? *Dee-toor,* it says, back at the cross-roads. They're state-roading it. Well, I got to go."

"Oh, wait, wait!"

She reached for her handbag under the robes in the car and fumbled at it. "Can't you telephone to the garage, somehow, for me?" she begged; "I shall die if I don't get something to eat soon!"

"I ain't had my own dinner," he grumbled, "and I promised m' sister I'd be right back. . . ."

"Why don't we eat your father's dinner?" Lucia interrupted, "is it hot?"

"Sure thing, we can!" he burst out, "I'll warm it up—I'll make a fire!"

For the first time since their meeting, enthusiasm shone through his freckles. He scurried about, laid small sticks deftly, waved aside Lucia's offered paper twist and fitted shreds of bark from a dead stump and dry splinters from a broken fence rail into a clever pyramid. Husbanding a match in the shelter of his cap he coaxed along a tiny blaze, and when it had reached the point where he condescended to leave it to Lucia, he foraged for broken boughs and the rest of the fence rail. His guest spread a rug beside the blaze and watched him hungrily while he abstracted a beer bottle filled with coffee and milk, emptied the pail of its thick sandwiches, wedges of pie, and the great lump of cheese that filled it,

and poured the coffee into the pail again, propping it between two stones in the heart of the fire.

"How well you do that!" she said appreciatively, and he nodded.

"Boy scout," he said; "I got to know how."

"Oh, yes."

"What'll we drink out of?" he asked suddenly, still squatting before his fire.

She ran to the car, bent under the seat, and emerged with a tiny picnic basket.

"Here you are!" she said, delighted at his amazement; "here are cups and forks for that grand pie—what a bully appetite your father has, thank goodness!—and here's some milk-chocolate! A whole cake!"

His eyes shone.

"I love choc'late," he said hopefully.

"And here's a bottle of mayonnaise—oh, wait, and I'll show you!" she cried, and hurried a tiny chafing dish over the quick coals. "What's in the sandwiches?"

"Fish-cakes. Cold," he said, "m' father's crazy about 'em."

"They're thick with butter," she assured him eagerly, "wait a minute," and laying the opened sandwiches on the hot metal, she shook them gently about in the generous butter. Then, piling the fish-cake mixture on top of the hot slices, she dribbled the mayonnaise gently over all.

"That's a club sandwich," she said, "help yourself!"

Side by side on the thick rug they fed luxuriously. The coffee sizzled in the pail; its odor and the heavenly warmth of the fire spread into a cloud of hospitality above and around them. Up to the second course they were too famished for idle chatter, but when Lucia had toasted two noble bits of cheese on two hatpins, and

the pie had nearly vanished, washed down with the last of the coffee, the humanities revived in them.

"What's your name, by the way?" said she.

"Tommy," he mumbled, one eye on the chocolate, "what's yours?"

"Lucia Fettauer," she told him gravely; "I suppose you don't——"

She had her cigarette case in her hand, but he shook his head.

"No, thank you. Not since I joined the Scouts. Bad for the wind."

"I see."

She lit her own reflectively and stretched out on the rug: the fire was going finely now and the wind had died down. All the gypsy in her delighted in the thing: she had never been more contented and amused since the days (how far away the little more than two years seemed, now!) when she and Max had run away on those delicious little picnics, the spring before they were married. How much they had found to talk about, then —the afternoons were never long enough. What on earth *had* they talked about? It was hard to understand now. And the strange, shaking little thrills, as their hands touched in handing sandwiches or feeding the fire . . . the acrid, good-smelling smoke had blown into her face, just the same. . . .

Lucia's nerves, not at their best just now, played an unusual trick upon her and twisted her mouth wryly; her eyeballs smarted.

"And yet," she mused drearily, *"if he were here this moment I shouldn't be pleased, particularly."*

She roused herself with a shake of the shoulders.

"Oh, well, what's the use?" she cried.

And then:

"Great thing, those Scouts," she began lazily.

"You bet!" He crunched his chocolate. "There's a meetin' to-day, but I promised m' sister I'd see to the kids."

"Where's your mother?"

"Oh, she goes out Sat'days. Then we're home, you see. She gets two dollars a day, an' it's too much to lose, she says—it's her own money, you see."

"But I thought you lived over the stable?"

"We did, till last year. Then ma got the chance to go out We'nesdays an' Sat'days and extra days when they have heavy laundry, if only she lived nearer the fam'ly that wanted her, an' pa said he didn't mind walkin' to Varnham's, an' they pay him more, an' we're that much nearer school—one mile, 'stead o' two."

"Oh, yes."

"M' sister's in high school now. She's learnin' shorthand afternoons, an' that's why I got to get back . . . see here!"

He sat up suddenly.

"If you wanted to go on to our house an' give her ten cents, she'd be ready to go, an' she c'd 'phone from Woodruffs—that's the fam'ly ma works for—and the garage would get a car or a team right up here. She'd get there in ten minutes. Then I'd wait here till someone came. See?"

"Well, I might," said Lucia doubtfully; "I'd keep warmer, I suppose. Will you look after the fire, too?"

"Sure!" he said scornfully. "That's one reason I thought I'd stay. Then the Scouts are out for hare-an'-hounds to-day, an'—an'—they'll go right by here!"

"Oh!" she grinned good-naturedly. "All right—is it far?"

"Less 'n a mile—not more 'n half a mile. First house

on the left, straight ahead. Just ask for Sarah Healy. I'll look after everything. Here's the chocolate."

"Oh, keep it," she told him and trudged on, laughing.

All the worries of the morning—and they had been many—had been smoothed away miraculously by this quaint little roadside picnic, and it was a cheerful Lucia that tramped at double-quick along the road singing snatches of *Madame Butterfly* atrociously out of tune.

Miss Sarah Healy was not hard to find. She fidgeted disconsolately on the dilapidated porch of an unpainted farm house and scowled at three young relatives of tender and neatly graded ages, sprawling about the bare dooryard. She was a chunky, competent girl of sixteen, and, as Lucia delivered her message, she uttered a cry of joy and blushed under all her brother's freckles.

"Sure I'll go," she said, "and I'll be telephoning from Woodruff's in eight minutes. I *was* pretty mad at Tommy, but, of course, if he couldn't help it . . . you see, ma pays for my lessons, and, of course, she has to go out to get the money, but all the same, I do hate looking after kids! It seems more like her business, being their mother—don't you think so?"

Lucia gasped.

"But if she's paying for you——"

"Oh, I know. But Tommy being late this way, I lose part of my lesson as it is."

"For heaven's sake!" Lucia cried hotly, "you're a mighty lucky girl to have a brother that'll do it for you, miss! *I* think Tommy's a brick!"

Sarah slipped a reporter's stenographer's note-book into her pocket and smiled calmly.

"Humph!" she sniffed, "you don't suppose he does it for nothing, do you? I guess not! A swell chance I'd have to get off Saturdays! He has to do a kind act every

day, and this counts him two—three, I think the gentleman told him, if it was a hare-and-hounds day! Then I get my pig money pretty soon, and he gets ten cents for every Saturday afternoon, besides!"

"I see," and Lucia giggled.

"Then is it really a kind act?"

"He says so," said Sarah, half through the rickety gate, "he says it's worth a darn sight more than ten cents, and the rest is kindness. It's all I can pay, anyhow."

She moved quickly away.

"Now behave yourself, kids, and don't make any trouble for the lady!" she called out, "and Tommy'll be here soon!"

She broke into a dog-trot and Lucia regarded the rest of the Healy family, who played stodgily about in an old express cart.

"What's your name?" she asked of the eldest, a boy of eight, but he only stared blankly at her, and Lucia, who was not fundamentally fond of children, gave up any further inquiry and chuckled to herself at the adjustment of Tommy's debts of honor.

She was not a patient waiter, Mrs. Max Fettauer, and it is to be doubted if her philosophy would have lasted long; but it was not taxed greatly, for, hardly had she strolled twice around the untidy house, peering in at the windows where draggled curtains barely hid the careless litter of a family of children, when a tall, thin woman in a worn ulster of strangely familiar lines and color walked briskly up to the door.

"Is this the lady that Sarah 'phoned about?" asked the obvious mother of Tommy and Sarah.

To Lucia's delighted assent she bowed pleasantly, with the unmistakable deference of the servant class.

"Indeed, madam, it's very kind of you," she said,

"I've seen you often at Miss Tina's—Mrs. Varnham, I should say. It's Miss Stanchon, isn't it?"

"You were—you used to be——"

"I was Miss Tina's maid, ma'am, for fifteen years—long after she was married. Healy was coachman, and I married him—'twas really to stay with her. I've seen Miss Nancy and Master Stafford grow up."

"You have two fine children yourself," said Lucia, "I like Tommy immensely—can't I give him something for Christmas? Has he got a Scout suit? And Sarah seems very ambitious."

Mother's pride lighted her sallow, lined face.

"If I do say it, they are pushers," she admitted, "their father's proud of them. Sarah's leaving high school next June—she'll have had two years—and she'll finish at business college. Then she's sure of eight a week, to begin. Eh, but that's more than ever I made!"

"That's fine," said Lucia enthusiastically.

"So Miss Tina says. But, of course, as I say, eight dollars is eight dollars, but where'll she live on it? There's no shorthand work here."

She sat down wearily on the sagging, rotted step.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Stanchon—I would say, Fettauer—but I'm that tired I can't hold up. Won't you sit, yourself? They'll be here soon from the garage. Yes, as I said to Miss Tina, I often think I was better off at thirty a month, and no expenses. Look at it now: I had my nice room all to myself, my good food, tips aplenty, two weeks vacation, and half the time Miss Tina unhooking herself at night!"

"But you surely don't want your daughter——"

"Oh, no, ma'am, and, anyhow, she wouldn't. She says she'll be making her fifteen a week in a couple of

years, and I don't doubt she will. That's as much as Healy was making when she was born."

"Think of that!" said Lucia kindly.

"It's a shame she has so many children!" she thought, *"her life is just dragged out of her!"*

"Yes, but we had a cottage free, and milk, and all the wood we wanted, and vegetables in the summer," said Mrs. Healy obstinately, "and I thought then that the children would be a help. Now look at 'em! Me neglecting the house—oh, I know it looks awful, Mrs. Fettauer!—to earn the money for all this education for Sarah, and she'll be off to New York the minute she's able! And Tommy, he's that crazy for travel that he'll be off to sea behind my back, like my father before me! The time's gone by when you can count on your children, Miss Lucia."

"It's a pretty hard proposition," said Lucia thoughtfully.

"And look at Healy!"

The relief of talking out her troubles had come to the woman: her thin face flushed, her dark, tired eyes burned into Lucia's.

"Would you believe that Tom Healy grudges me that five a week I earn, now the holiday season is on? He wants to put it into lessons for him so that he can learn to be a chauffeur! And then he'll pay it back! 'Not much, Tom,' I says, 'not if I know it! I'll pay for lessons for my children, but not for my husband!'

" 'But it's all velvet, what you earn,' says he.

" 'Velvet! *velvet!*' "

She shrugged her lean shoulders.

"The velvet I earn scrubbing other women's clothes is velvet I'll keep!" said Mrs. Healy.

"You're dead right!" Lucia cried hotly, "the idea! I shouldn't give him a cent!"

"But I do, just the same," said the older woman with a whimsical smile, "you just have to. We don't get much credit, you see, poor people, an' a few dollars comes in handy when it's the end o' the week an' the butcher boy stands waitin'. An' their shoes an' all . . . oh, well, I'm lucky to have the money."

"But, good heavens," Lucia protested vaguely, "then the more you earn, the more——"

"The more I'd spend," said Mrs. Healy, "yes, ma'am. I often say to Healy, 'For God's sake, Tom, leave me go out six days a week and bring home my twelve dollars!' "

"Only then—there'd have to be somebody paid to look after the young ones!"

"I suppose it would cost—" Lucia began thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, for anybody I c'd trust, like. If they was orphans or half orphans the Sisters 'd take them . . . but there, what's the use of a family if you can't have 'em at home? Here's the automobile, Miss—Mrs. Fettauer."

Lucia stuck a coin into each of the grimy fists in the old wagon.

"I'll be thinking of a job for Sarah," she said soberly, "and really, Mrs. Healy, there are worse places for a boy than the Navy, I'm sure. I'll see Tommy before I go. Good-bye—good-bye, children!"

The shame-faced runabout trundled along at the end of a rope behind a battered seven-passenger *Fearless,* and the easy-going mechanic with a pipe in his mouth nodded to Lucia as she climbed in.

"She's cluttered up with carbon for fair, ain't she?" he asked cheerfully, "when was she cleaned out last?"

"I don't know," said Lucia absently, "see here, do

you think a man has any right to the money his wife earns?"

"Not much!" her conductor replied promptly, "but you ain't got nothing on me, lady, 'cause I ain't married. See?"

"Oh! Then you think it might make a difference?" she inquired satirically.

"Oh, well—you can't most always sometimes tell!" he said knowingly, "can you?"

She was silent.

"Are you one o' them suffragettes?" he asked after a while, nursing the attendant runabout around a nasty corner. "Mrs. Varnham, *she* is, I know."

"I haven't made up my mind," said Lucia thoughtfully, "but I know that if you earn money it's yours—I know that."

"Hey! Votes for women!" he crowed unexpectedly, "it's the yellow ribbon for yours, all right, all right!"

"Bosh," said Lucia coldly, "look out for your tires here—there's glass around this corner."

"Thank *you*—I saw it. Who pays her board, while she's earning this here money?" he demanded testily, changing his gear for the heart-breaking hill that kept all ladies-in-dread-of-their-chauffeurs away from Hawkfield.

"Wh-what?" she gasped, rising to a bump.

"I say, who pays her board while she's earning this here money?" he repeated loudly, above the shameless cut-out.

"Why—why, *she* does, of course—housekeeping!"

"Oh! How's she housekeepin'—while she's earning the money?"

Lucia gulped.

"She isn't necessarily working every minute," she instructed him; "I suppose she has *some* free time?"

"Oh! Then I s'pose she pays him for her board for the time she isn't housekeeping? Her free time?" he suggested.

"You're ridiculous. I see you don't understand me at all," she said with dignity; "I suppose you could hardly be expected to."

"Ho! You think I don't get you! Well, you're off," he answered composedly. "I get you, all right, all right!"

"You've passed by the turn," she cried sharply. "How can you back, with my car behind? How stupid of you!"

"Easy, now, easy!" he said, "we're not to go to the big house—Mrs. Varnham 'phoned to wait at Adler's house—the superintendent. So I'm takin' you the new road to the back gate."

They swung into a narrow wood road.

"*I* know who pays her board, all right," he went on triumphantly, "I get you! It's hubby—she boards with hubby, she does!"

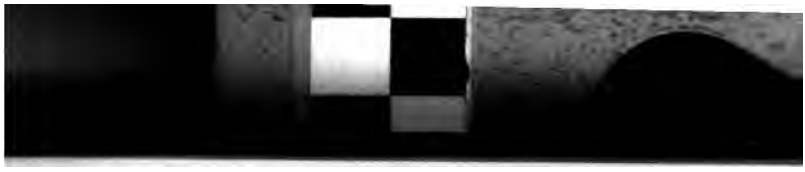
He twisted his clever, vulgar face about to meet her eyes in spite of her.

But Lucia was no coward—and no snob, at heart, though she had sometimes been called so.

"Oh, I know what you mean," she said stiffly, "but you've forgotten something. Let me tell you that any woman who has a child pays for her board, and don't you forget it!"

The memory of the most frightful nine hours of her life surged over her, and she shuddered.

"All right," said the man submissively; "I pass. You win. (Look out for those ruts.) I'm a bachelor myself."



Lucia nodded.

"Here's Adler's," he went on, "Mrs. Varnham 'phoned she'd turn up here and for you to wait. I'm to take the car along back, I s'pose?"

"Yes, please," said Lucia, "and will you lift out the little trunk and the rugs? Thank you," and she held out a folded bill.

"Much obliged."

He stuffed it into his hat and the car jerked off.

"Is this yours—or hubby's?" he shot at her, and, before she could speak,

"Votes for women!" he crowed and flew away.

CHAPTER XX

The Balance Sheet

NOW Lucia, like many others of her intense vitality, had little sense of humor, though she would have shot on sight the daring person who should presume to say so. But she had a great and healthy sense of fun, and she laughed aloud as she knocked smartly at the neat glass-paned door of Celestine Varnham's superintendent.

She was still laughing when the immaculate young housewife opened the door and found it necessary to explain herself.

"That chauffeur is so ridiculous," she said, gasping, "I am Mrs. Fettauer—I'm to wait here for Mrs. Varnham, I believe?"

"Oh, yes. Won't you come in, Mrs. Fettauer, and sit down? Mrs. Varnham will be here any minute now."

Lucia sank into the cushioned rocking chair with a sigh of appreciation, and the squalid little Healy farmhouse faded softly from her mind. Here, from the shining, painted floor to the shining, white-frilled windows with red geraniums on the sills, everything breathed comfort and order. The room was evidently half dining, half sitting room. A sewing machine stood in one corner, near an iron stand full of flowers in bloom; framed photographs of popular pictures filled even spaces on the unobtrusive walls; an enormous canary pranced and

trilled in the southern window. Through the open door a fleckless kitchen peeped, and baking bread scented the air with warm and homely sweetness.

The young woman who seated herself across the gay, fringed table from Lucia, and buried her fingers under a mass of bright wools, might have been five years either side of thirty. She recalled a trained nurse in her straight, broad-shouldered trimness; her smooth, striped dress fitted like a uniform. She was perfectly composed, perfectly independent, and yet she was not of her visitor's class, clearly, though her nails were as well kept as Lucia's and her speech more carefully correct.

"That man from the garage," she said, without raising her eyes from her work, "is a great character about here—everyone knows him. Len Voorhees, his name is. He says what he likes."

"He certainly does," Lucia agreed; "we were having a great old argument about wives keeping the money they earned. He was rather impertinent, as a matter of fact, but I don't think he knew it, or meant to be."

"Oh, I'm sure he didn't," said her hostess. "He's the same to everyone. Mr. Adler—my husband—used to feel that Len was being impertinent to me when he was teaching me to drive the machine, but he really was not."

"Oh, do you drive?" Lucia asked interestedly, "so do I. Whose car?"

"My own," said Mrs. Adler quietly.

"Oh!" and Lucia gazed about the little sitting-room curiously.

"Len Voorhees," Mrs. Adler continued, "is like *Henry Straker* in 'Man and Superman'—do you read Bernard Shaw?"

"Read it?" Lucia repeated, surprised, "why no—I saw

it though, I think—didn't Robert Lorraine play it? The aviator?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said the other; "but there's nothing about aviation in it—*Henry Straker* is a mechanician. Shaw believes that they are the coming men—the real rulers."

"I don't remember anything like that in the play," Lucia remarked, "but the leading woman was an awful frost."

"We don't go much to the theater," said Mrs. Adler.

"I suppose your husband finds the car a great convenience?" Lucia hazarded, "Hawkfield's so big now and the roads are so good."

"Mr. Adler? Oh, he never uses it—it's my machine," said Mrs. Adler, "he's very fond of horses, and he and Mrs. Varnham go all over the place on horseback. I'm the one that needs the car."

"'That needs it?'" Lucia repeated curiously.

"Yes. I give music lessons and the distances are so great about here. I can give six a day with the machine."

"Every day?"

"Oh, no," and she smiled gravely, "there wouldn't be any such demand. Tuesdays and Fridays. That's the way I earned the machine."

"Well, well!" Lucia's quick enthusiasm flashed out in one of those magnetic smiles that few people resisted; "isn't that great! How long did it take you?"

"Fifty cents a lesson is about all anybody likes to give," said the busy knitter, "and twelve a week is all I have time for—three in the morning and three in the afternoon. That's just six dollars, and it took me just two years."

"Well, well!" Lucia said again.

"Now, of course, it's all clear gain," Mrs. Adler went

on, "and one of my pupils pays a dollar besides. I'd need something, anyway, to take the children to school—it's nearly two miles and a half."

"Oh, have you children?"

"I have a boy and a girl. They're five and seven now, and I'm saving the money to put them both through college."

"For heaven's sake!" gasped Lucia; "isn't that a pretty big proposition? Doesn't your husband——"

"Oh, we couldn't afford it on *his* salary," said the wife composedly, "he has his insurance to carry, you see, and prices are rising so steadily. It costs me eleven dollars a week for food this year, as against eight three years ago. And we have our milk all the year 'round at that."

"Eleven dollars apiece? Why, isn't that rather high?" Lucia put in critically; "I've been looking up boarding places lately for some people——"

"Eleven dollars for four," the other woman interrupted briefly.

"Oh!" said Lucia.

"Of course, we have to eat well," Mrs. Adler explained conscientiously, "my husband is out in the air all day working hard, and giving lessons is a nervous strain, and the children must have the best. But, you see, with twelve hundred a year that takes out half, directly, for food."

"I know. My father's chauffeur gets that, and he's always complaining he can't live on it," said Lucia thoughtfully.

"Probably he can't," her hostess suggested, "they're not very well educated, usually, that class, and they don't understand food values."

Lucia blinked.

"That's why Mr. Adler and I stay here," Mrs. Adler went on, her fingers ceaselessly moving, her eyes never raised. "Mr. Adler was offered fifteen hundred a year as instructor at State Agricultural, but we talked it over and we decided that we'd lose, on the whole. We thought I'd have to have a girl there, and feed her as well as pay her. Then, perhaps, I couldn't get the lessons there—I'm the only teacher about here. Our clothes would cost more, and he needs out-door life, and the rent and the milk and all—it all adds up. The air is fine for the children, and Mr. Adler enjoys working with Mrs. Varnham very much—they are making a good many valuable experiments this year. For instance, she let him turn a whole crop of apples into the soil this fall. It's just like working with a man, he says."

Lucia stared at her.

"You mean to say you'd really rather he—" she hesitated.

"Oh, a professor sounds very grand," the other woman replied, "but it's a good deal to pay for the name. He knows just as much, wherever he is, doesn't he? And I want my little girl to go to Vassar—I make a good deal with these," she added, lifting the colored wool till its complicated pattern disclosed itself.

"But how do you ever get the time——"

"That's it. Because I do things myself. See here," and she rose and led her guest into the warm, fragrant kitchen.

"This is baking day, so I'm doing my beans and a rice pudding in the stove, but I use the fireless cooker a great deal—I put a whole dinner in, Tuesdays and Fridays, and give Mr. Adler his in a thermos tin, and everything's all ready cooked when we get back. Mrs. Healy comes in for a day, every other week, does the washing

in two hours in an electric washer (we get the power from the big plant on the place), cleans the house while it dries, and does the ironing that afternoon. Mr. Adler put an electric attachment on the sewing-machine and the mangle and you can iron a sheet and fold it in two minutes. Mrs. Varnham gave me a dish-washing machine that the cook would *not* use, and I've found out how to do the pots and pans in it—I have to keep my hands smooth for this wool, it catches so. I expect to do one of these a week in winter. Excuse me, I must take out my bread."

She slipped her long, blunt-tipped fingers into heavy leather gloves and turned out the spicy, brown loaves, tapping each smartly before she inverted it on its tin.

"I never heard anything like it!" Lucia marveled; "I wish I had you in my office—would you come for a thousand a year?"

Mrs. Adler pursed her lips.

"They offered me that to teach in the music settlement in New York," she said; "I have a gift for teaching children, you see, though I don't play particularly well myself. But it's every day in the week—and, then, what would Mr. Adler and the children do?"

"You could commute. . . ."

"And by the time I'd paid my commutation ticket, and a woman I could trust to keep house and take care of the children, and her board, and what she'd waste, and my clothes, and Mr. Adler's time to get the children home from school, and subtracted what I make from lessons now—where would I stand?" she retorted quickly. "No, I've gone into that."

"I should say you had," Lucia breathed admiringly, "I should say you had!"

"It isn't money—it's what you get for money," Mrs.

Adler pursued, knitting as she walked back to her sitting room, "and then, of course, if you have a family, you want to stay with it."

"Of course—of course," said her guest hurriedly, and then, "I'll bet nobody takes away *your* money, Mrs. Adler!"

For almost the first time the calm brown eyes met hers, widened, then drooped.

"Oh, no," she said quietly, "it's in my name at the bank. It's for the children. Of course, Mr. Adler gets restless sometimes—he wants to buy land of our own, and every now and then he gets the idea he'd like to go into horse breeding. And he says it's money lying idle. And his father—father Adler is a German, but my husband was born in this country—father Adler tries to convince him sometimes that it's his money—not mine. But, of course, that's nonsense, because I should simply stop giving lessons—that's all. And my husband knows it. It isn't as if I kept the money for myself. It's for the children."

"What would he do if you stopped?" Lucia asked abruptly.

The other considered.

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully, "nothing much, I suppose. What could he?"

There was a silence.

"It puts an awful lot on you, just the same," said Lucia.

"Yes, but I can do it."

Triumphant mastery shone in the grave brown eyes.

"I never was one for gadding. I have a great many resources in myself, you see."

"I should say you had," Lucia murmured, thinking of Bernard Shaw.

"And I never waste an hour. I often say to Mrs. Healy, 'You could keep your house clean with the time you spend gossiping with the milkman and the butcher boy.'"

"But, heavens and earth, you have to let go a little sometimes!" cried Lucia.

"I don't see why," said Mrs. Adler.

"And you must remember she has millions of children—dozens!"

"Five," the other suggested temperately.

"Well, five, then. If you had five children——"

"Excuse me—I never *should* have five children: we couldn't afford it," said Mrs. Adler.

"Oh! I see."

Lucia's half-patronizing admiration shifted, suddenly, as a helpless weather-vane shifts to the compelling wind. She felt crude and uncertain before this bright, hard glaze of efficiency. Dimly it became apparent to her that, in the adjustments of means to ends, this music teacher had out-generaled her own imposing office force of filing cabinets and stenographers. In the presence of such professionalism she felt, for the first time in two years, a very amateur.

"There's Mrs. Varnham now!" she cried, relieved, as Celestine's little old fourteen horse-power runabout nosed up the winding bluff whereon the cottage perched.

"For heaven's sake, does she bring that car across this back yard?"

Her hostess smiled indulgently.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Varnham takes it all through the woods, wherever there is any sort of path at all. It's six years old, and our veterinary used it hard for five years. I heard he was changing and advised Mrs. Varnham to get it—for two hundred. Everyone on the place uses it

and it costs practically nothing to run and saves a great deal of time. She says that just because she doesn't care what happens to it, nothing ever does!"

"Well, well!" Lucia cried, as the ridiculous, panting, mud-splashed object bumped into the kitchen door, "why didn't you come up the front steps with it, Tina? Why slight the back porch?"

"Hello—hello!" the mistress of Hawkfield replied good naturedly. "Don't make fun of my donkey-engine, Lute! If we hadn't located that worn-out washer when we did, I'd have driven down the well with her! How-do, Mrs. Adler?"

"I am very well, I thank you, Mrs. Varnham," the superintendent's wife replied precisely. "Will you and your friend have your tea here? I can have it ready in a moment."

"I'll bet you can," Celestine responded briskly, "but we must get on, thanks. I haven't been in the house since nine this morning. Hop in, Lucia. I'll send down for your stuff."

The "donkey-engine" took its zig-zag course up a sufficiently rocky pasture, caromed off from a tree-stump, bounded over a negligible ditch or two, and lurched into the nearest approach to a road it had seen that day. Immersed in a heated argument as to the advisability of continuous low speed when employed in turning in your own length, the two friends avoided all less important issues; and only when they had relaxed before the comfort of the great living-room fire, where the four-foot logs burned red and steady and the steam from Celestine's wet and high-laced boots yielded to the heartening aroma of fresh-made tea, did they sink into personalities.

"Well, how goes it?"

CHAPTER XXI

Double-Entry

"OH, well enough," said Lucia.

Celestine Varnham sat on the broad, leather-topped fender and spread her hunting-length tweed skirt to the heat.

"Lord, but I got damp in that pump-house!" she sighed comfortably, "try that strawberry jam—it's frightfully good. The kid made it. And butter me a muffin, will you?"

"I didn't know Nancy did that sort of thing."

Lucia essayed a polite interest. Fond as she was of Celestine, she had never cared for young people, and Nancy and Stafford Varnham, at sixteen and fourteen, respectively, represented little more than family luggage to her.

"Yes; she's really very funny about it. She embroiders, too. She's doing chair covers in that lovely Italian stitch. So queer—in *my* daughter."

Celestine dropped Hawkfield cream in great blobs into her cup.

"How's that?" she demanded proudly, "pretty good stuff, what? You can stick a spoon up in it."

"Fine," Lucia replied absently, playing with the translucent ruby jam.

"How's the baby, Lute? Still gaining?"

"Oh, yes. The scale's no use any more, Ellen tells me. She's all right."

not, I'd like to know? I'd kept house before—for father. But I'd never earned fifteen hundred a year."

Celestine pursed her lips and stared at her friend.

"Why, Lucia, I believe, I honestly believe, that you think . . ." she began, and stopped.

"Well, what?"

"I—I . . . oh, goodness, I can't explain, if you don't see!"

"Why not?"

"You're awfully obstinate to-day, Lute, dear. I only mean that anybody would think housekeeping in this or that house was the main difference between marrying or not."

"I think it is," said Lucia obstinately.

Celestine shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't you?" Lucia challenged.

"Oh, well, my dear, *I've* been married nearly eighteen years," the older woman parried.

"H'hm. I thought so," said Lucia coldly.

The ensuing silence was not wholly comfortable.

"Well," Celestine began at last, "and how's *your* business, Lutie? Anything new with you?"

"They want me to open the new Massachusetts probation house," said Lucia, "and a lecture bureau in Boston offers me a hundred a lecture if I'll speak there next week with those moving picture slides I showed the commission in Albany. They think there would be a demand in Detroit and Chicago, probably."

"Good work! Shall you?"

"Max doesn't like the idea," said Lucia listlessly.

"Oh. Well, you can see what he means . . ."

"Oh, yes, I can see what he means well enough, but we could use the money very comfortably, Tina, just now."

DOUBLE-ENTRY

"Of course . . . do you suppose anybody will ever see any money again? This year has been too dreadful!"

"You see," Lucia went on, her voice uncharacteristically monotonous, Celestine thought, "you see, Max really hasn't any idea of our expenses, Tina, and it's no use explaining, just now."

"No use? My dear girl——!"

"Oh, I simply mean that a lot of things just happened together that couldn't have been expected, and we're a good lot behind."

"But Max is doing so awfully well——"

"He's getting an awfully good reputation," Lucia corrected quickly "and that isn't necessarily the same thing, with a professional man, you know. For instance, he's doing a lot of work with Dr. Bull, and that is tremendously useful to him, but he's only assisting, you know, and that's not very remunerative."

"I see," Celestine agreed thoughtfully.

"Then that friend of his, Doctor Ridgeway, that married the woman doctor, you remember. He developed tuberculosis and had to be packed off to Saranac, and Max is practically taking his work at the hospital. And, on top of that, he's working on his book with that big German doctor—Steck, you know, that dined with us the night we had His Nibs' box? Well, the book is promised for next fall, and Max has all the translating and footnotes. He hopes a great deal from it—but it means lots of work at present and no return for over a year, anyhow."

"That's stupid," Tina commented. "Isn't it?"

"But of course, you have your own money, Lute."

"Ye-es, I have my own money. And when we counted up, five thousand that Max was sure of and two thousand of his own anyway, and my twenty-five hundred, why,

when I added fifteen hundred a year for three half-days' work, I tell you, I felt pretty rich," Lucia admitted with a wry smile. "As father pointed out, that was twice what he married on. But that was a long time ago."

"A long time ago," the older woman repeated absently.

"Then, of course, I'd kept house so long, and I had all the accounts, and I could calculate just about what it would be," Lucia went on, "but, you see, I'd only seen the actual tradesmen's bills—I mean the butcher and grocer. Father ordered all the wine and cigars from his club, and flowers and taxis and—oh, all that sort of extras, he attended to in a lump, and lighting and heating and repairs. I never saw a plumber's bill in my life."

"It's quite a sight, sometimes," Celestine commented feelingly.

"Yes. And we had Old Mary's cousin for house-man, and he did all the furnace and sidewalk and window work. Father paid all that."

"Oho!" Mrs. Varnham remarked.

"Not that it mattered much," Lucia added hastily. "I didn't need twenty-five hundred for my clothes, and, when my house money simply wouldn't cover things, I just made it up. That was all right, of course. We didn't really expect to live on seven thousand."

"I hope not, and entertain as you did," Celestine suggested.

"Oh, nonsense. You can't have people doing everything for you, and not . . . and, of course, Max had lots to pay off. A bachelor is different."

Lucia poked the fire into a blaze of crimson and orange.

"Max doesn't understand!" she burst out suddenly, "he's perfectly ridiculous! I admit it would have been

absurd not to keep that little car—it was practically given to Max. And Joseph learned to drive it very quickly. But there's no use in expecting a man—even a Swiss—to be a butler, and an office man, and really *clean* the drawing room floor without a parlor maid, and valet you, and drive the car, because you can't drive the day you operate, and then take him into your laboratory for an assistant! Now, is there, Tina?"

"It certainly seems a lot," Celestine agreed.

"A lot!" Lucia echoed scornfully, "I believe you, it does!"

She played restlessly with her cup.

"So I did the only sensible thing to do—I quietly engaged another maid to help Joseph and also upstairs. Then I got more of the chambermaid's time, and I've really got her trained into a very decent personal maid. That left Joseph a great deal more to Max—and I have the car myself more," she confessed, "for taxis are simply too ruinous. And, since we have it, we may as well use it, and save something."

Celestine smiled wisely.

"Max himself thought Joseph had better go on ordering," Lucia went on drearily. "Joseph had always catered for him—no living in boarding houses for Master Max, you know! and he was very economical. But, what Max forgot (and I forgot it, too," said Lucia honestly) "was that his little suite down at Eleventh street was near those cheap markets on the avenue, and Joseph had plenty of time to prowl around and *marchander*—he actually took a basket. Of course, you can't do that up town—there aren't any cheap places. And Joseph hasn't time, anyhow. So Max is horrified at the bills. He's been so used to all the women he knows complimenting him on his cheap little dinners and his

wonderful Joseph that I suppose he thought he really did it all himself! And I admit perfectly freely that our bills run just like everybody else's," said Lucia, "just!"

She drew a long, worried breath.

"As to *my* marketing—oh, well, what's the use?"

Tina shook her head.

"You can't," she said briefly.

"Of course, Max thinks that I could attend to it every other day, and that sounds reasonable enough. But, you know, Tina, and every other sensible person knows, that I give a great deal more than every other day to my work. It's not that I'm at the office. But it's on my mind all the time. I do all my telephoning mornings—it's the only time to catch people—and really, I'm never through before quarter to ten. And it seems to me," Lucia burst out fretfully, "that I was half the time in the shops, till—till I got that maid trained to do it. I don't know how it is, Tina, but I never used to shop! It's the most riduculous, nerve-racking business—why, I'd rather open a branch office any day than start out with one of those awful lists the servants give me!"

"That's what the men say," Celestine suggested.

"Well, they're dead right," Lucia assured her gloomily, "dead right!

"First Joseph and then the cook and then the nurse hand me out those nasty slips of paper, and say that if I'm passing by Baltman's or Bark and Milford's or the druggist's, will I please. . . ."

"You see, Mary used to do it for you at home," Celestine put in.

"That's what I'm coming to," Lucia went on. "Last month I hadn't a cent and I was a little overdrawn at the bank, it seems, and Max had to make it up. Of course, he was more than willing to and he was only

teasing me a little, but—by George, Tina, how women stand that sort of thing who haven't their own money . . . ! Lord!" Lucia puffed out, "I'd rather scrub for my living!"

"I know."

"So then we went into it, rather, and Max found out about the other maid and suggested that we'd have to cut down in service. Now, that's the one thing I simply can't do, Tina. *I* don't care if we never drink anything but Scotch, and I'll wear my clothes till they drop off my back—but I must be decently taken care of. Thérèse just keeps me going by sparing me all those vile little strains and annoyances that no ordinary chambermaid has the sense or time for. And I can't be bothered, Tina—I can't!"

A deep wrinkle grew between Lutie's heavy, glossy eyebrows.

"You've no idea how this work has grown since you left the Board, Tina. It's entirely my idea, all this co-operation with the Bedford Reformatory and the children's courts; and, since we incorporated, I have to see so many people—it really isn't wise to let the reporters talk to anyone but me. And it's getting pretty delicate, keeping officially out of the unions and suffrage and politics, I can tell you," said Lucia with a sigh.

"It must be," Celestine agreed.

"And there's where I pay them, of course," Lucia went on slowly, "it's not like the secretaries and the inspectors and the trades teachers and all those. They're trained, and all that sort of thing, but they don't have the effect on the newspaper people and the big men and the manufacturers and the people that I talk to. Ever since I jollied those I. W. W. delegates along till we could talk to Senator Bland, the Board has been at me

to do more of that, and take so much a day for it—like a commissioner, you know. I'd probably go to Washington, ultimately."

"O-o-oh, I see," said Celestine. "Well, you *are* going it, Lute!"

"I'm only telling you this—it's between ourselves, by the way—to show you that I can't exactly run around the corner and buy a head of lettuce and a tin of tooth-powder and a pair of blue kid shoes for the baby," Lucia explained. "And I can't remember where I put my gold slippers and whether my lace blouse was mended and that the ceiling leaked last week in the nursery. Max doesn't have anything like that to carry!"

"But Max is carrying the family, you know—practically," Celestine reminded her.

"Oh, is he?"

Lucia shot her a curious look.

"Let's see about that. Max has seven thousand a year—theoretically. Well, one thousand of that he puts absolutely aside—won't touch it. He used to put twenty-five hundred, till we were married."

"Max *is* a European, isn't he?" Celestine murmured, "one forgets that. I suppose that's to retire on."

Lucia nodded.

"He thinks it's perfectly awful the way professional men live up to their income here. Well, I have four thousand practically. Of course, I dress myself and look after all my expenses—I expect to. Then when I saw where taxis and flowers and all those odds and ends were getting to, I just quietly paid them, on the basis that they were more or less my affair, anyway. Then, the baby . . ."

"My dear Lucia, you don't mean that——"

"Oh, well, it was nothing at all for so long, Tina.

You see, you and Marie and Mattie insisted on giving her every stitch to start with, and father went in for bassinets and cribs and tubs and scales, and all that; and there wasn't a penny of expense about her arrival, for the doctors and nurses simply fell over themselves and fought for the privilege. You were out here running the scarlet fever, you know. I had a day and a night nurse and an obstetrician and an anesthetist and an assistant and Craigin, and the Lord knows what. It was like the Queen of Spain. The street was blocked with motors and the traffic officer had to come around to clear a space for the next house, where they happened to have a party of their own."

Lucia grinned and ended in a reminiscent gulp at those bitter-sweet memories.

"So, really, when I bought her the few little things she needed from time to time it would have been idiotic to think of Max, and, anyway, my housekeeping money just barely covered. And it's never amounted to much yet. But this winter, when I happened to mention what a lot that beaver coat cost I got her for motoring, and Max was so critical about it, I realized that it had gotten to be my affair, somehow, and—and I simply couldn't change."

"I think you made a mistake," said Celestine quietly.

"Betty Girard looks after Cynthia, Tina—we all know that!"

"Betty's income is bigger than yours will ever be, my child, and has grown steadily ever since she married."

"But mine may, too."

"I don't see how it can," said Celestine flatly, "you say that Max objects to your giving any more time, as it is, and——"

"But if I made more, I could pay more for service——"

"And get more time to make more in order to pay more to get more time to work more!" Tina finished rapidly.

"My dear child, I've been all through it. Take Betty, if you like—she's been through it, too. The more she makes the more she spends. And she has the satisfaction of being a successful artist and a celebrity. You and I can't expect our ability, which is really executive ability, ever to yield us that satisfaction.

"My dear child, the only woman I know who has this business worked out so that it really works is Mrs. Adler!"

"Adler?" Lucia repeated vaguely.

"My superintendent's wife. Oh, you can't fool Louisa Adler! She has this game down to dollars and cents, and she gets ninety-nine cents on every dollar. More money doesn't fool her, and more social position doesn't fool her, and more leisure doesn't fool her. She has all the feminists and suffragists and theorists lashed to the mast and screaming for help, Dick says!"

"She's so everlastingly capable she tires me to look at her," Lucia observed.

Celestine studied the set face opposite.

"Why, child, you're stale already—you ought to get away."

"I can't," said Lucia grimly, "if I go away to rest, that backs up Max's arguments too much: when I take out time to work and time to manage the house and time to play—there's no time for rest."

"Ah, you've found that out, too," said Celestine. "They tell us change of occupation is rest—but not for me."

"Nor me, either."

"And another thing."

Celestine's eyes turned anywhere but in Lucia's direction.

"You must remember that you've never had the care of Gretchen at all, Lutie. Modified milk is practically a prescription, and that trained nurse of yours puts it up. Gretchen never had a pain in her life, had she?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, there you are. Can Ellen take care of two children?"

"She'll have to," said Lucia grimly.

"You're near the park, anyway."

"Yes," Lucia agreed listlessly.

"Is—is Max pleased, Lutie?"

"Oh, yes. He wants a boy, of course."

"Does he expect to save the thousand then?"

"I suppose so. He expects the money from the book next year"

"H'm. It's a good thing you've got Joseph, child. Of course, he's spoiled Max thoroughly, and nobody else could look after him. He's certainly a wonder."

"And the trouble is," Lucia added, "that what Max doesn't see is that, though he was a rich—at least, a very well-to-do young bachelor, he isn't a very rich married man. He simply can't see where the money goes, and yet we're not living any better than either of us lived before!"

"My dear, your father lived extremely well. You never realized how little you had to count what things cost—the little things, I mean, that add up so sickeningly!"

"I suppose not."

Lucia's look was frank bewilderment.

"And there's another thing. I know Max feels that I've always got father in an emergency—well, I haven't. Max doesn't realize that father has always lived right up to his income. There was nobody but me, and all he saved for, ever, was just for my income of twenty-five hundred a year. When he got that invested and solid father stopped, practically. He stopped operating last year; he gave up his hospital position, to give the next man a chance, he said; he's amusing himself with his book, and I think he'll go south every winter now. He's doing an immense amount of charity work—more than anybody knows. He feels that what he gave me is all I ought to have—and it is."

"Well, Lute, we always told you to remember you weren't marrying an American. People say that the difference between our men and foreigners is the way they treat women, but I think it's the way they treat money, really."

"I know. Max doesn't seem to think there's any reason why I shouldn't put mine into the family expenses, as a matter of course. I thought it would be the luxuries, the little extras, the things we didn't really need. . . ."

"Do you know, you're just like Katharine? My old maid that married Healy," Celestine explained. "She went out to do days' work with the idea——"

"Oh, I know all about her idea," Lucia interrupted hastily, "of course, with that class it's quite different—it's really necessary, if they expect to get anywhere. But we had enough to start with, I thought . . ."

"Child, nobody has enough," said Celestine soberly. "It doesn't work out that way."

They waited a moment while the tea-tray left, and stared silently at the fire.

DOUBLE-ENTRY

"I remember so well when Betty was married," Celestine began softly, "Walter was furious if she put a penny into that big apartment on Fifty-ninth they had. I remember she got some finger bowls once, Venetian glass . . . he insisted on paying the bill."

"He's got bravely over it, apparently," said Lucia curtly.

"Oh, heavens, yes. The only man I know who sticks by those ideas is Peter Forsythe. Of course, Mattie only has a few hundreds from her godmother, but that has nothing whatever to do with her personal allowance."

"Really?"

"But you must remember, my dear, that Peter's very early-American *in every other way, besides!* He plays the game straight through, Mat has her money all right enough—but he has her!"

"Oh, well," said Lucia, stiffening in her chair, "if that's the alternative, I'll worry along as I am, I think. I can stick it out if the rest of you can. And I don't quite agree with all that about earning more to spend more to earn more. I'm going to show you. In my position you can't afford to save, really. It's my time and peace of mind I must have. With Joseph to manage and take the details off me, and Ellen, I can go to Boston and make those speeches and——"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Fettauer, the telephone?"

A white cap and apron loomed out of the firelit dusk. The evening had closed upon them. Dicky Varnham shouldered into the room suddenly, bringing all the crisp winter air with him.

"Did you get the name?" Lucia asked mechanically.

"Yes, Mrs. Fettauer, it's Dr. Fettauer. It's important, he said. He'll hold the wire."

"Go up into my room, Lane: and call down if it's anything . . ."

Lucia was on the stairs.

"I do hope it's nothing about the baby." Celestine began acrimoniously.

"Oh, no—the kid's all right." Dicky said comfortably, "Fettucer wants her to go to some darn concert or other—'Parsifal,' probably. Gosh I'd hate to be married to anybody that liked to go to 'Parsifal!'"

Celestine yawned slightly. Her husband's views on the opera were quite familiar to her.

"That'll be a nice little bill for the pump, eh?" she suggested.

"Oh, well, Adler was right all the time. We ought to've had regular tests. And what you made on the bottled water will cover it, won't it?"

Celestine gasped.

"I like that!" she cried hotly. "I must say I like that, Dick Varnham! And you fought me from the start on bottling Hawkfield water!"

"Oh, well . . ." he grinned, and kicked the back-log into sparks.

"We'll say my selling commissions will cover it, then—how many hotels did I get you?"

"Now, Dick, you know that's not the point. The point is——"

"Can I get the seven-ten back to town?"

Lucia stood in the doorway, tense and low-voiced.

"Why, Lucia, what is it? Is Gretchen——"

"Oh, she's all right. Max has just broken a pleasant bit of news to me, that's all."

"Lucia! What?"

"Only that Joseph and Ellen were married this afternoon and are sailing for Europe to-night!"

DOUBLE-ENTRY

"No! Lute! Good heavens!"

"Exactly," said Lucia drily, "good heavens. That's the idea."

"But have they—when did Max——"

"Just now. It seems they've planned it out for some time, but didn't dare to tell us. Joseph wants to run a *pension* in Switzerland. He got a cable last night that his wife's mother had just died and he's got to be there to see about the money."

"His wife——?"

"He's been married, it appears, but he didn't get on with his wife and paid her an allowance to leave him alone. She's been dead six months and they didn't tell him, but just took the money. Now her mother is dead and has some little property, and she was one of two children and Joseph wants to realize."

"Holy cats!" gasped Mr. Varnham, "it's quick work, ain't it?"

"Joseph is a quick man," said Lucia coldly.

"Max says Ellen feels dreadfully, but she simply must go, she says. Of course, I can get a trained nurse immediately, as far as that goes, till I can find another of those baby nurses. I can probably get one in for to-night. Max has sent out for two or three for me to see. And Ellen says she'll put the baby to bed before she sails and leave all directions."

"But, Joseph! Oh, Lute, what will you do? What will Max do?"

"That remains to be seen," said Lucia, "will you tell them not to unpack my trunk? Oh—my maid has given notice, too, Max says. She says it's too great a shock for her and she doesn't like changes. She really means she doesn't like Joseph marrying Ellen, I suppose."

"For heaven's sake!"

"Max suggested cutting her wages last night," Lucia added, "but he told me he offered to raise her this afternoon!"

"I know—men always do that," Celestine murmured. "But, Lutie, what will you do about Boston? How can you break in a new man——"

"I can't," said Lucia brusquely, "it's out of the question, of course. Ferris must go to Boston. I'll get my office work out of the way to-morrow—I can't get any servants Sunday, of course—and put off that meeting I called for Monday. Then I'll work Tuesday instead, at the office, and give up that opera lunch Wednesday. Tina, will you write Mattie? And telephone Van Wynken, will you, that he'll have to get somebody else for that dance Wednesday night? I can see people then and have the day free for the office."

"When you say 'office,'" Dicky began, with the expression dedicated to his peculiar brand of humor, "do you mean your prison-reform office or the intelligence office?"

Lucia smiled curiously.

"I mean both, Dick," she said.

He whistled softly.

"By George," he offered thoughtfully, "that's tough, ain't it, Tina? You've rather let yourself in, haven't you, young lady? And I s'pose you can't cut either of 'em out, exactly . . ."

"No. I can't cut either of 'em out," Lucia agreed. "Can you manage the seven-ten, Tina?"

"Sure thing," Dick hurried on, "I'll run you down, myself. It's a rotten shame. Just get your things on. There's your trunk now. By George, it's certainly rotten luck—all at once, this way. But that's what it is to be married, ain't it, old lady?"

DOUBLE-ENTRY

"Yes," said Celestine slowly, "that's what it is to be married."

"Of course," Mr. Varnham went on jocosely ("get my glove, somebody, will you?) of course, here's where the little bright-eyed wage-earner gets into the game. Just tell Herr Max to go to thunder and find his own valet! Say, *'I've* got to get down to business, *I* have!'

"You could, couldn't you?"

"Oh, hurry up and order the car, Dicky," Celestine said impatiently, one hand on Lucia's broad shoulder.

"She could, of course—but she won't!"

And the eyes of the women met.

CHAPTER XXII

The Home-Stretch

NO one of them ever knew what occurred between Lucia and her husband on the February night that brought her back to town in the final, whirling blizzard of that winter. Marie noticed her pallid face and ringed eyes the next day but one, at the office, but accounted for them easily when she learned the tragedy of Joseph and Ellen and the consequent domestic upheaval. Mattie, who had always been a little afraid of Max, accepted good temperedly his defection from her dinner-party, and soon grew accustomed, in the weeks that followed, to seeing Lucia alone or with the useful Van Wynken.

Betty, ever since that last autumn week-end at Hawkfield, had almost avoided the Fettauers, it seemed, never turning up where they were, persistently engaged when invited to dine, and only free for lunch as it grew increasingly customary for Dr. Fettauer to lunch out of the house. Even then Lucia found herself—absorbed and silent. Celestine, sworn to secrecy as to Lucia's expectations of a new motherhood, but more than ever interested and friendly, found herself unaccountably, impalpably, but quite clearly put off in her advances.

Lucia grew harassed and overworked; the gloss dropped from her hair, the spring from her walk; her voice deepened and grew curt. The summer found her in a cottage at the shore, with a busy secretary; her

husband made no pretense of anything more frequent than week-end visits, when he lay all day on the beach with little Gretchen.

Once Peter thought he saw him with Betty at the Claremont Restaurant, and once Ranny Fitch, lunching uproariously with his latest footlight divinity, called out to the young surgeon, stepping into a taxi behind a fluttering skirt:

"Well, well, we all come to it, don't we?" then checked, as Mrs. Girard's amused smile met his curious eyes.

That autumn Doctor Stanchon listened quietly to the reasons for the day nursery now established in Max's bedroom, and the vastly more convenient apartment added to his downstairs suite.

"And we used to say that children drew them together!" he mused, *"ah, well . . ."*

And then suddenly, that winter, their little group fell apart, with the curious sharp break that so often separates such intimate circles. Betty carried her slim, cool Cynthia to a convent in France and stayed across the water from week to week, till they ceased to believe her promises of return. Celestine's boy developed a weakness of the eyes that prevented study, and led Dicky Varnham to a step that surprised everybody, for he leased Hawkfield for a year, gathered up his amazed family and dropped with them onto a *dahabeeyah,* in mid-Nile. Marie accepted the biggest commission of her career, and went to Virginia to build for her first old client the finest modern mansion of the south, taking with her, as a budding architect, young DuLong, whose sudden Byronic cynicism, since the autumn, coupled with a certain platonic paternalism for Nancy, had much disturbed the young lady's mother.

"I thought he was one of Betty's victims!" she had

complained to Mattie, who had first laughed scornfully, then looked worried and a little wistful.

"Tina," she had said shyly, "I sometimes get so *bothered* about Betty! I'm ashamed of the things I can't help thinking, sometimes!"

"Then don't think 'em," Tina had replied sturdily, "do you think we'll need mackintoshes on the Nile?"

"No, but Tina! Doesn't Lutie see, at all? And I can't even talk to Doctor Stanchon, because . . . because . . . oh, Tina, *he's* fond of her, too—I'm sure of it!"

"Fond of her? For heaven's sake, who? Lucia? I should hope so."

"No; Betty. Of course, Lucia never sees anything like that . . ."

"And *you* see a darn sight too much, my dear. Really, Mattie Forsythe, you're growing into a regular old gossip!"

"Only to you, Tina. And it's all very well to say my mind's always on that sort of thing—yours and Ri-ri's and Lucia's are *never* on it: isn't one as likely to be wrong as the other?"

Celestine had stopped in her renting inventory of Hawkfield furniture and looked thoughtfully into Mattie's troubled dark eyes.

"There may be something in that," she announced gravely. "In fact, Dick as much as told me that once, not so long ago. He said that girls of Lucia's type had practically no feminine intuitions. Is that what you mean?"

"I suppose so . . . oh, but I'm going to miss you all! Do you think we'll ever get the crowd together again?"

"Come with us," Celestine had suggested, but Mattie shook her head despairingly.

THE HOME-STRETCH

"Gracious! Peter Forsythe was away from the office four months that summer before the baby was born, and he says that's his vacation for four years!" she sighed. "But, then," and she smiled reminiscently, "it was worth it!"

Celestine stared hard at her.

"Really, Mat, really?" she asked suddenly, her keen eyes deep in her friend's, and then, "oh, heavens, you needn't blush so—I believe you!"

"I wish Max would take Lutie off for a little change—she looks dreadfully," Mattie added, but to Celestine's brief,

"Would Lute go?" she had no answer.

The swiftness of that year was like a dream to all of them. Stafford Varnham's complete recovery they learned from occasional letters; Marie's enormous success with her American palace and Betty's brilliantly established European reputation they were free to learn from half-tone photographic trophies in illustrated papers. Lucia's second child, another daughter, shared this latter form of advertisement; the extreme versatility (not to say nobility) of the brilliant and executive Mrs. Lucia Stanchon Fettauer, in undergoing maternity in the midst of her civic, by now, national, interests, was discussed in many a Sunday edition.

Little Nette Fettauer in her mother's arms, against embroidered bed-pillows, with Lucia picturesque in Marie's lace boudoir-cap; "the baby daughter of Washington's first woman Commissioner" feeding the squirrels in Central Park with a vanguard of interested chauffeur and proudly streamered nurse; Mrs. Lucia Fettauer, née Stanchon, waving good-bye to her charming little girls from the platform of the special car that was to carry her and the Secretary of the Interior to California on

their prison investigation tour—one or another of these thermometers of Lucia's social and professional progress kept finding their way to her friends' library tables long after Stafford's triumphal entry into Harvard. Marie's great Virginia house warming, and Betty's commission to paint a portrait of the leader of New York's smart set.

"Dr. Fettauer must have completely changed his mind about Lutie's pictures in the papers." Mattie said one evening, pausing suddenly from a revision of the last solemn lists of Sister Forsythe's coming-out party.

"You know, dear, he absolutely kicked out that reporter when Gretchen was born. But Peep showed me in this morning's paper the prettiest picture of Lucia teaching the baby to swim at Bermuda. I wonder how she happened to take her? Nette is three, Peter—does it seem possible?"

Peter grunted.

"It's not the kid at all," he said with an after-dinner chuckle, "Varnham's in town, and I met him at the club this morning. It was some other child, he told me—Tina knows the child: somebody's in Lucia's party. But it does just as well for the papers."

"It's funny Dr. Fettauer changed his mind," Mattie persisted absently.

"Perhaps he hasn't," her husband returned.

"But, Peter! . . ."

"I don't believe Fettauer cares a tinker's commission," he assured her in haste, "and that's God's truth!" he added cryptically.

It was a fortnight later that Mattie, the epoch-making début accomplished, pushed off her tight satin slippers and spread out her toes with a sigh of relief.

"My goodness, but I'm tired of standing!" she said,

"come in, girls, and do be comfortable. What a gorgeous thing, Marie—is it a Chinese priest's robe?"

Mrs. Randall Fitch shrugged her thin shoulders under the writhing, plum colored dragons; her waved hair, exquisitely gray, was curiously piquant above the orange and apricot of the silk about her neck.

"So the customs said, when I brought it through," she answered. "Well, Mattie, you can't bring out a daughter, sitting down, you know! It was a great success, very nice, I thought."

"Really, Ri-ri? I'm so glad."

Mattie was unaffectedly pleased. Marie, of all their little circle, had always been the social arbitress—unconsciously and without the faintest aspirations to the position. But the daughter of Leroy Trimblee, for two generations the cotillon leader *par excellence* of New York and Newport, who called everybody of any importance in America by his first name, was a welcome guest at any function she chose to adorn (and criticize) and her best friends, each representing a slightly different order in the great social adjustment, required no higher seal of approval than Mrs. Ranny Fitch's.

"It was a very good idea—separating the dance and the reception," Marie went on, "Martha was fresher for both, to begin with, and the older people weren't bored and had a really decent chance to see each other."

"That's just what Dick said," and Celestine Varnham slipped into the room in the business-like, almost tailored negligée that was so characteristic of her. Tina's thick sandy hair was of the shade that relinquishes last of all to time. Only a deeper parallel between her eyebrows, a harder slant from ear to chin, marked the years that had taken her son through Harvard and would have

enabled her daughter to make her the most modern of golfing grandmammas.

"I really think Dick enjoyed it, Mattie. He saw so many people he hadn't met for ages."

"And who do you think wanted those people asked?" Mattie inquired suddenly. "Martha!"

Her face wore the usual puzzled expression assumed for any discussion of her daughter.

"Really, if you could have seen that child's list! I give you my word, they were all either professors or settlement workers or—oh, well, what her father calls 'high-brows,' generally!

"'But, darling, does he dance? Will she enjoy it?' I kept asking.

"'He's awfully intelligent, mother, dear,' she kept answering, or, 'you'll love to talk to her, I'm sure'!"

"Martha dances very well herself, though, Stafford tells me," Celestine put in, with the easy knowledge of the younger generation possible only to the mother who chums with her boy.

"Yes, but she doesn't really care much for it, Tina. She says it's rather going out at Bryn Mawr now, and that's one reason she's so glad to go there."

"What I can't understand is her coming out at all," Marie said doubtfully, "of course, she has these Christmas holidays, but back she goes, just in the middle of the season, and what's the point? All this year's débutantes won't see anything more of her till Easter."

"Her father wanted it—it was to please him," Mattie explained.

"Oh," they breathed understandingly, smiling a little at her tone of simple finality.

"But why on earth," Celestine persisted, driving her hands deeper into her square, masculine patch-pockets,

"why on earth does Peter send her to college, feeling as he does, then?"

"He doesn't send her—exactly; she wanted to go, you see. She always has."

"Oh! And he didn't mind?"

Mattie considered carefully, with the little pucker of the brow dedicated to any dissection of her marvelous Peter's mental processes.

"I don't believe so, really. He wouldn't have wanted *me* to, but, with a daughter, it seems to be different," she brought out finally.

"Aha!" cried Celestine, and they all laughed.

"But it is funny," Marie resumed, sitting cross-legged on Mattie's roomy *chaise-longue,* hugging her knees, where sea-green butterflies and scarlet crabs mingled in wonderful color swirls, "it certainly *is* amusing, girls. Here is Sister Forsythe, brought up by governesses, hovered over by a doting parent, lugged to dancing school and confirmation classes, just as we were, 'chained to the hearth-stone,' as Betty says—and she goes to college and wants to vote! Did you, Mattie, ever?"

"Never," declared the mother of Sister Forsythe, with conviction, "never—that is, not for long!"

"Well," Celestine began, "I don't see that it's any more amusing than *my* daughter, if you come to that! Look at Nancy, now. Ever since we came out into the country to live, and that's—oh, heavens, children, it's more than five years ago! Do you realize it?—ever since then, when I found out that I really could run a big place like ours, and make it pay, it's been the dream of my life to have Nancy take it up after me and prove that farming on that scale really is a profession for women.—She and Stafford have always been more like lovers than brother and sister, and he took to it all like

Betty Girard has had in every capital of Europe, practically——"

"Oh, but Cynthia doesn't think anything of *that*," Mattie explained eagerly, "she only wants Betty to do what she thinks is proper—what they thought proper at the convent."

"Oh, *darn* that convent!" Celestine burst out. "I'm sick of hearing about it."

They looked a little uncomfortably at each other. Mattie Forsythe's pink-and-white bedroom, all ruffles and wicker chairs and soft, crowding pillows, seemed less peaceful, somehow, less secure and entrenched in its successful family life, than before. With their vivid, dark-eyed Betty, shooting like the meteor she was across the quiet talk, the consciousness of the great, confused New York they sat in came to them in a lightning flash, in spite of the gentle grate fire and the tender pink of the chintzes Marie had brought from English country houses to frame Mattie's soft, white-flecked hair.

"I'm worried about Betty," said Celestine abruptly. "I wish she looked older."

"O my goodness," Marie began, "you don't believe all that nonsense about that Italian count person, do you? And, anyway, how can Betty help it? People are everlastingly falling in love with Betty, aren't they? We're all used to it."

"It's so absurd, the way she keeps on looking thirty-five," Celestine went on discontentedly. "It's not that her hair keeps so dark, but there are so few lines in her face, and she laughs like a—like——"

"Like Betty Girard," Marie finished quietly. "Yes. But she looks fifty when she's bored."

"I suppose," Celestine added whimsically, "that's why she takes such pains not to be bored!"

THE HOME-STRETCH

"She certainly takes pains," Mattie grumbled.

"If you mean that aeroplane," Marie began, hugging her lemon and scarlet knees argumentatively, "I understand that it was the only way she could escape daughter Cynthia! If I'd been tied all day to a young mother-superior that looked like a Russian grand duchess, *I'd* go up in an airship, myself!"

They laughed, but uneasily. It was, of course, too much to hope that their little quartette, friends from the old Dodworth days, these three, when they had lifted their fluffy dancing skirts in the same strict line, should all come into port, safe and happy at the last. It was too much, and yet they *did* hope; and as Life, the old school mistress, gave each her diploma and placed them, one by one, each in the firm, hard-chiseled niche of her middle age, a little niche that each had carved at some time with her bleeding hands and washed at some time with her bitter tears, so that it fitted her individual outline as no other background could—as each of the three gathered in Mattie Forsythe's bedroom settled comfortably and gratefully into her supporting place, she looked wistfully at the fourth, where Betty Girard's, most wonderfully and wilfully carved of all, still stood empty. For no one knew, as no one had ever known, what the brilliant and beautiful Betty would do—until she did it.

It had been like her—exactly—to elect to come to Mattie's girl's dancing party rather than the reception for her mother's friends. It had been like her, too, to prove the best dancer on the floor and to invent a series of fantastic and exquisite figures that had taxed the cleverness and endurance of her son's generation. With him for a partner she had whirled off all the honors and utterly captivated the great Italian nobleman who had

graced Martha Forsythe's coming-out dance entirely because of Martha's mother's friend.

"There," he had been heard to say, as Betty and her son ended in a triumphant pirouette, "there stand, in my judgment, the greatest American painter but two and what will be the greatest American sculptor, bar none, if he lives. Extraordinary. They tell me her daughter is to marry into one of your 'royal families.' Extraordinary."

And Betty's friends had smiled uneasily. Somehow, as a sharp knock sounded on the door, they knew it for hers and did not rise as she came in, but held out each a friendly hand from their various comfortable poses; Mattie deep in a roomy willow sofa, Marie cross-legged on the *chaise-longue,* Celestine straight-backed, even while she sat on the floor by the fire.

"Well, old lady, how goes it?" said Tina bluffly.

Betty always looked different from other people—it seemed her fate. Exotic, when her friends were conventionally clothed, she looked this evening positively theatrical amidst their negligée, in her severe riding-clothes, with a Park derby, and a tiny shell-mounted crop in her gauntleted hand. Not a hair was out of place above her great, eager eyes, not a fleck of mud on her high, varnished boots.

"I suppose you haven't heard?" she asked abruptly.

They started.

"Cynthia really engaged to his young American Highness?" Marie hazarded.

"She is, as a matter of fact—though you won't mention it—but I don't mean that."

Wonderful Betty! Cynthia would be rich beyond any counting and châtelaine of a great estate and a palace in town. Betty had painted his mother's dowager por-

trait and his sister's, with her first baby, and he had been kept in the room to amuse them while she worked. All lads adored her and unbosomed themselves to her, and once he had made it perfectly clear that he liked the frigid, aloof, virginal type, how natural that he should meet Cynthia, shining like a chilly star among the hoydenish maidens of his set! For a year he had worshipped his young nun, and now——

They sighed gently and looked at each other.

"Whom have you selected for Naldreth?" Marie inquired satirically.

"Nonsense—he'll marry one of his models, probably. Cynthia's very lucky—the boy's nice, though she'll always have to rule him," Betty said simply. "But it's not that I meant. It's Lucia. You haven't heard anything?"

"Betty! What?"

They leaned toward her eagerly.

Never quite so close as the famous old four (the "Big Four," in Dick Varnham's slangy phrase) Lucia, though ten years their junior, had always been nearly enough allied to them to warrant her contemporaries' jibe that she hung around the older women. Celestine had enlisted her in the Civic activities which had become the overwhelming interest of her life, and through which she had become a wage-earner and a well known executive; Betty had dressed her for her wedding; Marie had furnished and decorated her house, and Mattie had chosen the wonderful layette for the first wonderful baby—now a quaint, silent little girl of five. One by one they had watched her take the ditches and hedges of the great steeple-chase of married life. One by one they had watched her confront the specious and complicated problems that tangle the woman of to-day in tentacles

unknown to the smoothed waters of early-Victorian voyagers. One by one they had watched her near, and grate upon, and miraculously steer off from reefs that were only beginning to appear upon their charts when they were of her age. And now, now that they had seen her triumphantly driving that tricky three-in-hand, her husband, her children, and her business (and no one of them but confessed to her own soul her inability to do this, for Betty's divergence from her husband was only too obvious, Celestine was out of sympathy with her daughter, and Mattie frankly put every ounce of energy into her home, to the practical exclusion of every other interest) now that Lucia, the wonder of her little circle, had proved so much, so well—what had happened?

For that something had happened, Betty's dry voice and controlled manner warned them.

"For heaven's sake, Bet, what is it?" Celestine repeated nervously.

"When are you dining?" Betty asked abruptly. "Usual time?"

"We're not dining," Mattie explained eagerly. "We sent the men off to the club. Martha's off to that theater party and we're going to have some trays sent up. Dinner's too much, after such a tea. I'm tired to death and Tina too, I dare say, though she won't admit it, probably. Marie only came toward the end. You'll stay, of course. What *is* it, Betty?"

"Oh, yes, I'll stay," said Betty. "She and Max are going to separate, that's all."

CHAPTER XXIII

The Head of the Family

NO one spoke, and the flicker of the coals in the English grate was the only sound in the pink-and-white room.

Mattie gulped back her breath.

"Lucia?" she began quaveringly. "Lucia Fettauer? Max? O, *no!*"

Celestine cleared her throat.

"You can't mean that, Betty," she said.

Betty shook her head impatiently and looked at Marie.

"Any comment from you, Ri-ri?" she asked, challengingly.

"None whatever," said Marie Fitch drily, fingering the scarlet dragon on her knee.

"Who—who told you?" Mattie demanded.

"She told me herself."

Betty took off the stiff derby and laid her gauntlets and crop carefully along the brim.

"I was riding in the Park with—with Ferruzi."

She waited, but they made no comment. "Just near the Mall Lucia was standing. She'd evidently got out of a taxi and waited for me; she had a lot of papers and account books in her arms.

" 'Look here a moment, will you, Betty?' she said, and I said, 'What can I do for you, Lute?'

" 'I just wanted to tell you that Max and I have decided to separate,' she said.

"What do you mean, now?" said I.

"We mustn't be seen if we don't," said she. "It's all settled, and I wanted you to know."

"Of course I gave my horse to Ferrari to take back, and jumped into the car with her. She was perfectly calm about it and we had it out. She was going to a committee meeting at the mayor's house."

"But Betty, why—what—I don't understand!"

Mattie's eyes were full of tears; her soft cheeks quivered.

"Doesn't Max—are they—did he—Oh, what is it, Betty?"

Betty sat down carefully on a small cane taboret and crossed her riding boots deliberately.

"I may as well tell you that in my opinion the thing's hopeless," she said. "I don't see any way out of it, myself."

At this Mattie broke down and sobbed. Celestine bit her lip and turned away her head. But Marie only shot a sharp glance at Betty, then resumed her study of the scarlet dragon.

"Doctor Max Fettauer," said Betty, "has been called to Neustadt, to be the head of the hospital there, and he has accepted."

"You mean in Germany?" Celestine asked incredulously.

"Germany's near enough, yes," Betty replied. "He was invited by cable and he accepted by cable. Lute was in Albany. That was Monday. She got back Thursday morning. This is Friday."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried Celestine disgustedly, "how insane! Of course Max will be reasonable! All Lucia asks is—is . . ."

She stopped, opened her mouth, then stopped again.

"Yes?" Betty inquired ironically. "All Lucia asks is——?"

"Of course that's a pretty big contract," Marie interposed quietly. "Is Max going to Germany forever?"

"For a term of years," Betty answered, "that's all he will say. He's perfectly frank about it and told her that in his opinion he was likely to come back after a few years, but that it was a great honor, would delight his father enormously, would advance him a great deal professionally, and he himself would like it. He also said—and I believe him," she added honestly—"that the fact that he would like it is not the fact that decides his going."

"And Lute won't give up her work?"

Celestine's face had fallen, and she looked old, suddenly. She was very fond of Lucia.

"Lute won't give up her work. She says he should have consulted her before cabling."

"And so he should! I don't blame her a bit!"

They all stared at Mattie, who mopped her eyes furiously. Her voice shook with anger.

"Still, she *was* in Albany," said Celestine slowly.

"He might have used the telephone. There *are* such things!" Mattie snapped.

Betty Girard gave a strange little laugh. "Women are certainly queer," she said slowly.

"Here is Mat, whose husband runs away with her, and hides her in a cave, and makes her do the cooking for him till she agrees to give up all her outside work and adorn the home for his majesty and the royal family generally. She obeys him sweetly, reads us all lectures on our failing to do the same—and then rows Doctor Fettauer because he prefers to live in Germany and

expects his wife to come, too! Then, here is Tina, who takes her husband off the Stock Exchange, makes a first-rate speculator into a second-rate gentleman-farmer, rules him with a rod of iron—and then criticizes Lucia because she objects to giving up the fine position she's made herself, lose her friends and her father, and go and live in a poky little German country town on a small salary!"

"I'm only trying to be fair," said Celestine, flushing a hard red.

"I only want Max Fettauer to show a little common decency!" cried Mattie hotly.

"Who keeps the children?" Marie asked.

"That's interesting, too," said Betty, looking curiously at them. "Ri-ri is the first to think of the children—and she has none! He keeps them, of course."

"Oh, no! O Betty!"

Mattie fairly fell on her feet and held out her hands beseechingly, but Betty only shrugged her shoulders.

"Why not? They're his children. There's no law against a man's going to Germany to live," she said carelessly.

"She wouldn't give them up!"

Celestine pressed her back.

"Sit down, Mat, sit down," she said.

"I'm not really surprised, though. Lucia's very determined, once she begins. He wouldn't leave her Gretchen?"

Betty shook her head.

"That's his price for the divorce. Of course he'd let her get it."

"But why must they be divorced?" Mattie wailed despairingly. "Why can't they just agree to separate for a while——"

"Don't be a donkey, Mattie," Marie interrupted. "Anyone would suppose you didn't know Max."

"That's it," said Betty shortly. "He says separations are ridiculous. It's divorce or nothing. She's got to choose, that's all. He'll stand the divorce, because everybody will know the real reason, and he won't contest it. She'll get the children technically, and then he takes them as a matter of fact."

"It's wicked," Mattie gulped.

"It's quite practical," said Marie Fitch.

"I *do* think separation is worse than divorce," Celestine added soberly.

"As a matter of fact, Max is quite as fond of the children as Lutie is," Betty went on slowly. "He sees quite as much of them, as it is. Lucia is proud of them and looks after them quite as well as the average—better, I think—but Max really enjoys being with them more, it seems to me. He likes children. Lutie never did, really. I think if she had to be a great deal with them, it would bore her."

"Oh, Betty!" and Mattie's eyes brimmed again.

"She's right," said Marie briefly.

Betty sighed and rose.

"Well, now you know all about it," she said wearily. "Do you want to see her? She's willing enough, but she won't be reasoned with or teased. If you want her to tell you again, she will, but you're not to tease her. Shall I tel-telephone her?"

Marie got up suddenly.

"Betty, where *is* Lucia?" she demanded.

"In the hall—downstairs," said Betty suddenly, "but if she's teased, she won't——"

Marie ran to the door and stood in the upper hall.

"Lutie! Lute! Come up, you lunatic!" she called

quickly. "Come up this moment!—Get her something to eat, Mat, and hurry," she added.

Mattie took up the house telephone from its table near her sofa.

"Bring up some supper for five," she ordered. "Bring it directly, please." And then the door opened, and Lucia stood in the room.

She had changed very little since the days when, as Lucia Stanchon, she had burst into Mattie's room, brimming with the first excited bulletins of the Woman's Auxiliary Prison Reform Committee. At thirty, Lucia had looked more than her age; at thirty-six she looked exactly that number of years; probably at forty-six she would seem less altered than any of the others but the ageless Betty. She was slimmer than in the old days, and, to Marie Fitch's gratified eye, more carefully tailored and hatted. Even the thinning of her heavy, molasses-tinted hair had not been without its compensations, for what was left of it after a year of intermittent neuralgic headaches, due, undoubtedly, to overstrain, was now effectively waved into a soft frame for her face, and the velvet toque that perched above it was as cleverly adjusted as Mrs. Ranny Fitch's own hats. Mrs. Max Fettauer, to put it briefly, looked not unlike that "well-dressed New York woman" of her one-time scorn.

Was it that, Mattie wondered suddenly, that had taken away a little of her old charm, her strong tang of individuality? Or was it simply the natural ebbing of that tremendous vitality that had warmed all her friends like a fire and positively electrified the rooms she entered?

"She's never been quite the same since Nette was born," thought Mattie. "I wonder why?"

They braced themselves unconsciously for a little struggle to win her confidence, to soften the obstinacy

that experience had led them to expect when she confronted them with some new, already-determined policy. But she turned to each of them with her gray eyes sad and questioning.

"Well? I suppose you're through with me?" said Lutie shyly.

And that was all. Not an argument, not a defense, not an explanation. Only that sad little question, and a softening of her gray eyes that misted them to blue and sent her friends back, somehow, back and back to the days when she had been Doctor Stanchon's little girl, with the great braids and the square, cleft chin.

"Yes, of course we are!" Celestine got out roughly, at last. "Of course. You didn't expect we'd ever speak to you again, did you? Don't be a donkey, Lute. Sit down—you look tired to death."

Lucia loosened her frogged jacket and sat on the arm of a chintz-ruffled wing chair. They had the feeling that she was perched like a bird on a twig and might flutter off from them at any moment.

"I am," she said simply. "Did Martha get my roses, Mattie? I simply couldn't come: to-day was the only afternoon the mayor could give me and the lieutenant-governor was asked especially. They've got Lady What's-her-name, the wife of the governor-general of Canada, you know, to say she will take the general presidency, and they want me to go there and speak before a big mass meeting of women in Toronto."

"Oh," they murmured, and "Shall you go?" said Mattie, evidently impressed to the point of forgetting what they had just heard. Mattie had never been able to outgrow her respect for the eager girl Celestine Varnham had presented to her, eight years ago; the girl who had been so respectful to her as Chairman

of the Woman's Auxiliary, the girl whose eyes had filled with nervous tears at her first little report, delivered huskily in this very room (because the drawing-room floor was being redecorated): the girl whose hands had clasped Mattie's in an icy clutch on the great day when, trembling but determined, she had made her first appeal for greater scope, more money, and a publicity which had swept the Advisory Board on to heights where editors, congressmen, governors, and presidents were glad to be her fellow-workers! Mattie's was a simple soul, and she had never been able to share the amusement of the others at Lucia's rapid rise to the seats of the mighty, and her spectacular reporter-haunted trips to every city of the first class in the United States.

Just now, because she had very especially tender recollections of Canada, Mattie smiled reminiscently and went on.

"Oh, I hope you *do* go, Lutie—Canada's so lovely, you know. Peter and I went there for our wedding trip—for the fishing. We spent our whole honeymoon there. Of course, it wouldn't be quite the same, your trip——"

"No, not quite," said Lucia drily, *"au contraire,* in fact."

"Mattie!" they cried disgustedly, and as she flushed, bit her lip, stammered, "O Lutie, you know I didn't mean it!" and burst into nervous tears, the others wavered between her and Lucia, who sat with pursed mouth and eyes hardened to agate gray.

"Shut up, Mattie!" said Celestine roughly, at length. "Anybody would suppose that this was *your* affair! Lute knows you didn't mean to make a fool of yourself!"

"Excuse me, all of you, but really I must laugh," Betty Girard murmured, and the supper trays found them

laughing together, more or less hysterically, but still laughing. The tension was broken now, and the two serving maids, still lacy in their best finery of cap and apron, found nothing out of the usual in this school-girl feast, fuller than ordinary, for Mrs. Fettauer had not been with them so much of late.

Betty sighed with pleasure as her own particular little table presented its white-napkined tray for her inspection.

"Scrambled eggs; bacon; thick soup—thank God!" she cried. "If it had been 'cold party'——"

"I should scream out loud if I saw any more salad," said Mattie plaintively, "and just the *smell* of consommé makes me ill. But there's not much, so I hope you all had plenty of tea."

"Why—not a bit," Betty exclaimed suddenly, "that's why I'm so nearly dead. I forgot. I was riding, and then . . . then . . ."

"Yes, yes," Celestine interrupted hastily, "I had lots myself. How about you, Lute?"

"Oh, I had my tea at—at—no, I didn't. I was with Betty . . . the taxi . . ."

"Of course," Betty interrupted in her turn, glaring at Celestine. "Now eat it while it's hot, child; you told me you'd hardly tasted lunch, you had to talk so at the mayor's."

They attacked the soup in silence. Marie, always capricious of appetite, satisfied herself quickly and watched the others. When they had begun on the eggs and bacon she spoke, deliberately.

"My dear friends, we're acting like idiots, do you know it?" she said.

"Now, listen to your Aunty Fitch."

Lucia started slightly. Ever since her little Gretchen

had insisted on this title (to the little Varnhams and Forsythes Marie had always been "Aunt Ri-ri") she and Max had laughingly adopted it, and it rang like a cracked bell in her heart.

"Don't you see," Marie continued, "that we can't go on this way, butting against this subject at every turn? We're going to embarrass each other and hurt Lutie's feelings every five minutes, unless we have this thing out. We've all practically agreed not to tease you, Lute, and we're not going to, so understand that thoroughly, once for all. Betty's told us all about it, of course. Speaking for myself, I want to say, right here, that however sudden these things may appear to outsiders, even to close friends, as a matter of fact, I don't believe they ever are sudden. A lot goes on, before the smash comes, that nobody ever knows. It's been so in the other cases I've known and it's probably so with you and Max."

She paused and Lucia bit off half a slice of bacon composedly and chewed it.

"Yes," she said presently, "it *is* so with me and Max."

"Of course. Well, Lutie, though you're not our age, you're no chicken, and you've been married six years. If you and your husband have decided to do this, it's your affair, and if you want to do it enough to stand the talk, and the wrench, and your father's feelings about it all, and the children, and all the rest, why it's not very likely that anything your friends can think of to say on the spur of the moment is going to change you."

"I'm glad you look at it that way," said Lucia, buttering a roll, "because you're dead right, Ri-ri."

"Now I don't know about Mattie," Marie pursued, "because the Lord only knows what Mat will or won't say, but all I *do* know is that she must say in it private. Speaking for 'the crowd,' it's all over, and all right, and

nobody's going to argue with you, my dear. It's not as if you would be the only divorced couple of our acquaintance, you know. But that being the case, there's no harm in discussing your plans, is there?"

She paused and looked directly at Lucia. Betty drew a long breath.

"Good old Ri-ri!" she commented. "When it's a question of horse-sense . . ."

Lucia looked frankly back at Marie.

"You're all right, Marie Fitch," she said, "and you certainly know how to put things. I don't mind discussing my plans a bit in the world: why should I? Especially as I haven't got any, in particular. I shall go back to live with father, of course."

"Then your father knows?" quavered poor Mattie, poking among her scrambled egg, her eyes too blurred with tears to see her way about the plate.

"Father? Why, of course! It's naturally no great pleasure to him, but he sees it has to be. It's queer about father," Lucia went on thoughtfully. "At first he was crazy for me to marry Max. Then, when he heard more of Max's ideas and how much they agreed with mine, he got worried, and began to think he wasn't a strong enough man for me. Then, three years ago, he actually quarreled with him because he wasn't putting his foot down and making me give up sitting on the commission and doing all that traveling. And now, when it's all over, and Max has suddenly changed his policy and put his foot down so hard that I should think he'd break his ankle, then father switches around, too, and says that Max is utterly impossible and that no American woman could live with him! Fortunately both he and father agree about the folly of separations, so it's divorce or nothing."

Celestine cleared her throat and drove her fork into the tiny jam-tart on her plate.

"The only thing that I can't get into my head, Lute, is the utter lack of reason for all this," she burst out. "I'm not arguing, but please let me ask you if Betty is right—is it really just because Max wants to go to Germany? Couldn't you stand it for a year or two? You know he won't stay there—they never do."

"I love the way you're not arguing, Tina!"

Lucia's lip quivered and her eyes warmed as she flashed one of the old jolly glances at her friend. Celestine smiled back, but persisted.

"No, honestly, Lucia! Only I want to know. Isn't it just to prove his point?"

"Since you ask me," Max's wife replied, "I don't mind saying that I think it is. Just. I'm sorry you find it so utterly lacking in reason, Tina. I should have thought anybody would find such an attitude a sufficient explanation for any woman's doing as I am."

"I think Max is horrid—horrid!" sobbed Mattie.

"But to ruin everything," Celestine began. Betty interrupted her sharply.

"Everything? Everything?" she cried. "Good heavens, Tina Varnham, is life nothing but marriage? Do you honestly believe that two people should go on fretting and rasping and maddening each other for thirty years more, just to keep up the solemn fiction of a marriage?"

"Not for themselves, no," said Celestine slowly, "I don't. When there are no children, I think people should do as they please. I can't see who suffers, then. But in this case——"

"In this case, I suppose you think I'm an ogre," Lucia broke in sharply. "But I've thought it all out, a hundred

times, and I've come to the same conclusion every time. I know you're supposed to give everything up for the children, but I could never do it, Tina and Mattie, and there's no use pretending. If Max drank or was shiftless or—or anything really dreadful, I should put up with everything, of course, if I couldn't get the children. But it's not so: he will probably be much better for them than I should—he and his wonderful sisters," she added with a twisted lip. "There's nothing the matter with Max, except that he's perfectly impossible to live with, and we're driving each other crazy, that's all. It's been getting worse and worse for a year. He disapproves of everything I do, and everything he says gets on my nerves.—For heaven's sake, Mattie, don't look at me that way!" she burst out. "Anybody would suppose that you really thought there was only one reason for wanting a divorce! When you know perfectly well that hundreds and thousands of women with plenty of that sort of reason don't sue for divorce at all!"

"I—I know," Mattie faltered.

"Max and I bring out the very worst of each other," said Lucia. "I've got so that really I dislike being in the room with him."

Celestine sighed and pushed away her little table.

"Really, Lutie, really? Is it like that?" she asked softly.

"It's like that," Lucia repeated quietly. "There's no good thinking about the past—these things happen, that's all. It seems to me a perfectly disgusting idea that people who feel that way should keep on in the same house."

"It's medieval," said Betty shortly.

"Exactly. And neither of us is medieval. We went into this with our eyes open and on the basis of a firm: well, the partnership dissolves, that's all."

"The only possible answer to that," Marie remarked, "is that this is the only kind of firm that leaves the partners with two extra human beings, as a result of the partnership."

"And yet," said Celestine thoughtfully, "I wonder just how good for these children it would be to live in an atmosphere like what Lutie describes? How long can you deceive them?"

"And as your only object in torturing yourselves and each other is to deceive them . . ." Betty exploded, then checked herself abruptly, as the maids came in for the trays.

"And yet—and yet, there must be things you can do!" Celestine began again wistfully. "Oh, Lute dear, if you only knew what a difference time makes! If you could only go away for a while."

"Thank you, Tina, but that's just what I don't want to do. That seems a little silly, to me. I should just have to keep going away, that's all. You know plenty of people that do it, don't you? How does it work out?"

"Tina means me, Lute, but she's too well-bred to say so," Betty remarked nonchalantly. "I don't mind. She means that when, after nine years of it the bottom fell out, with Walter and me, I thought it over (assisted by your father, by the way, Lucia) picked up the children, and ran over to Europe. It was all right, of course—I was going for study in Paris and languages for the children. We stayed there two years, and Walter came over now and then, and I came back finally, with a few medals and two French children, and we settled down. That's all. It's been tried before, of course, and often works."

"But you don't deny it was a good thing, Betty?"

Mattie's voice was eager.

"I . . . don't . . . know."

Betty's eyes grew somber, and her rich voice dropped a tone.

"It was ten years ago, Martha—and I had my pictures, you know. I worked like a demon in Paris, and saw a lot of people who were all doing the same thing, and really made good. What would Lute have, in that way? Then, I took my children a little more seriously than Lute does, and, anyway, I had to—Walter never understood children. I couldn't have left them. But if Lutie did go to Germany, what would she do there?"

"Wouldn't Max go for a year and leave you here? Everybody would understand."

"Very practical, Celestine," Lucia replied drily. "I'm quite willing, myself, but he says no. Here's where we decide it, he says. Either he's the head of the family, or he's not."

"But he doesn't *have* to go. . . ."

"And I don't *have* to stay," said Lucia, honestly.

"It's just a deadlock, you see, Mattie," Marie put in wearily.

"If Lucia had no money, and depended entirely upon her husband, she'd have to go. If she were the average woman, she'd run after her children, like a cat after her kittens, and simply revenge herself by making Max miserable ever after. As it is, she feels that she's more likely to make a mess of her life with the children, under certain circumstances, than without them, under certain others. That's all. And she knows she can trust them to Max."

"Oh, dear! It all seems so upside down!" Mattie moaned.

"It seems upside down because you take such an

Early-Victorian view of it, my dear," said Betty, soothingly.

"Now, if Herr Max threw Lutie down the stairs and trampled on her, drank like a fish, and abused the children, you'd understand her leaving him. And yet, she might love him, even then."

Mattie sobbed softly.

"Or if Lucia fell madly in love with somebody else and ran away with him," Betty pursued inflexibly, "you'd regret it, of course, but you'd understand it. And yet she couldn't expect to keep the children. But women do that, every now and then—we all know them."

"How any woman can leave—I can't see——"

"Oh, nonsense, Mat! You may not see, but the fact is, they do. And their husbands get a divorce and keep the children. Now, if Lutie won't pay Max's price, she loses the children, that's all. That is, I suppose you do, Lutie? You wouldn't have any case?"

"Oh, no—Max is perfectly able to support me. If I won't go with him, it's up to me."

"I think it's all rather silly, you know," Betty went on disinterestedly. "I believe that in another generation Lucia will have exactly as much to say as to where she will live as Max has. Suppose she earned more than he does, to-day? Suppose *she* were a doctor, and had a hospital position *here*——"

"None of that makes any difference," Marie interrupted decisively, "and you all know it. If Lucia loved Max enough, she'd go. If he loved her enough, he'd stay. If they both loved the children enough, they'd compromise. As it is, they're both perfectly honest—and perfectly selfish."

"Selfish!"

Lucia faced her defiantly.

"Of course you all make fun of me, and you none of you have taken this prison work seriously, since you left the Board, one by one," she began hotly, "but I want you to know that I *do* take it seriously, and that it's my work! It means as much to me, Marie Fitch, as your decorating business, though I don't make a tenth of what you do.

"And I notice," she went on relentlessly, her eyes fixed on the older eyes that met hers bravely, "I notice that when *your* husband gave you *his* ultimatum that time you told me about, in Bermuda, Ri-ri, you didn't do as he said—not by a long shot! No, you stayed behind and laid the foundations of your business."

The others swallowed hard and looked away from each other. Marie Fitch's married life was never discussed. Each of them, one by one, had nearly lost her friendship, long ago, by attempts at sympathy, and each had learned her lesson.

But Marie looked straight into Lutie's eyes and spoke.

"I know," she said, "I know, Lucia. But I was many years younger than you—and I had no children. And I would give my business ten times over for two children like yours—and a husband I could . . . respect."

Lutie bit her lip and dropped her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Marie," she said thickly, "the cases are quite different, of course."

"Your father warned me," Marie went on, her voice quite colorless, "but I was headstrong and I thought I must protect my rights for the future—*my rights!* Good God!" she breathed. "Doctor Stanchon said,

" 'My dear child, you're in a tight place. You've married a very dangerous young man, and you've never had much discipline, yourself. You can't afford to let your

temper get in your way. You'll have a lot to forgive, my dear, but you'd better begin!' "

She paused. They listened breathlessly.

"Well . . . I didn't begin, that's all," she said.

"It doesn't need much of a clairvoyant, Marie, to see that you think I'm in the wrong," Lucia began stiffly.

"Wrong? Wrong?" the older woman repeated. "Who said anything about wrong? Or right? When I see a person throwing away a string of pearls for a string of buttons, do I call her wrong? I call her blind, that's all."

Lutie allowed the silence that fell on the room to last no longer.

"It's a pity I didn't develop your taste for the country, Celestine," she began, but Tina stopped her abruptly.

"My taste for the country? Are you crazy, Lutie?" she cried. "Why, you know perfectly well it was your father that sent me there! I remember so well sitting in his office while he told me the truth about Dick—I wish I could forget the nasty things I said to him, when I saw he was making me give up the Board! And yet he said pretty dreadful things to me, too . . . but they were all true. . . . I never cared anything about the country, Lutie—Healy was only coachman then, but he managed everything. But I suppose Doctor Stanchon knew that I had executive ability, and that I might as well put it into Dick and the children as prison-reform. And it made Dick over—he couldn't stand New York."

In a flash Dick's heavy, weak, lovable face appeared to each of them, and they nodded soberly.

"And Stafford: he's more like his father than anybody guesses," Tina went on, as if to herself. "I trained him for six years to love the country, and now it's all right. . . ." She drew a long breath.

"It nearly broke my heart to leave all the committees

and come out here," she said simply. "That's why I worked so hard at it and made it go. But I used to cry all over the model pig-pens, at first."

"Poor old Tina," Marie breathed softly, "you had your bad time, hadn't you?"

"O Lord!" Celestine shook her head slowly.

"If Lutie thinks she's the only one! Why, just before we came out here, Dick as good as told me that, as far as he was concerned, if I wanted a divorce I could get it. He said we'd grown so much apart that it was more or less of a farce, and—Oh, I suppose I goaded him into it, and, of course, he didn't really mean it, but all the same he'd have stuck by it, I believe, if I'd insisted. But I didn't think it was quite square to the children to consider it, even. So we—we got by it."

"And fell in love and lived happy ever after!" Lucia added vindictively.

"Lutie!"

But Celestine smiled away Marie's indignant cry.

"I don't mind, Ri-ri—she's only a baby, really, you see," said Tina, "and she's angry because she's not in love. All that seems very childish when you get to where you see what it's all for. Why, I'd go through it all over again, just to feel as contented about that boy of mine as I do to-day. There's nothing lasts but that."

"Isn't there, Betty?" Lucia begged, turning to her. "Isn't there? You don't think that, do you?"

Betty Girard twisted her beautiful artist's hands about her knee and evaded Lucia's pleading eyes.

"Why, I really can't go back on my job, now, can I?" she queried, parrying. Suddenly she lifted her heavy, sweeping lids and faced the younger woman full.

"I'll put it this way," she said quickly.

"Your father, not so many years ago, caught me when

I was just about ready to—to make an ass of myself. There—there really *might have been* a man . . . that time. . . . He didn't waste much time over moral platitudes, but he said one thing I never could forget.

" 'You've made a family,' he said (we were walking through the woods at your place, Tina) 'and that's something more than you and your husband and your children—it's a real, vital thing, a thing with a spirit. . . .' " She paused.

" *'That extraordinary thing, a family,'* " she repeated, as if to herself, " *'which is not merely you, plus your husband, plus your children, but a definite entity, a something beyond its parts, with a foundation and a personality all its own!'* "

They listened, wondering.

" *'And you built yourself into it,'* " she went on softly, " *'and now you can't get away from it. . . .'*

"I can quote it exactly," she said, "it burned into my mind. It moved me very much. I saw suddenly what he meant. . . . Oh, Lute, I'll back you up in anything you want to do, but don't make any mistake and get mixed on this thing: there's not a portrait I ever painted I wouldn't throw into the fire if it would help to make my boy the great artist I know he can be!"

Her rich voice rang like a thrilling bell; they realized that they had never before known quite exactly the color of her eyes.

"You see, Lutie, we're none of us a bit different from Mattie, at bottom," Marie said, as lightly as she could. Martha's eyes widened.

"Oh, Ri-ri, how can you? I know perfectly well I'm not clever like the rest of you," she protested.

"You're the happiest woman in the crowd," said Marie briefly.

"Oh, well . . ."

"Of course we couldn't all marry Peter—we understand that," Betty added, mocking.

Mattie still blushed, and proved it.

"But all the same, it was your father that saved me, Lutie," she went on bravely through the pink flush. "I'll never forget some of the cross things he said to me when I had those headaches before—before——"

"Before Peter the Great absconded with you to the cave?" Celestine suggested.

Mattie nodded.

"And it was Doctor Stanchon told him to," she confided shyly. "Peter told me, after. I said cross things to him, too, I remember, Lutie, about you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I remember I said, 'But you let Lucia do all these things, and you correct the proofs of *her* papers!' and he said to me, 'Lucia's my daughter, Mattie.'"

"Father seems to keep everybody straight but me," said Lucia bitterly. "I wonder why?"

Mattie looked at her in simple surprise.

"Why, just because you *are* his daughter, Lute dear," she answered quickly. "Don't you see? He can't bear you not having everything you want. That's what it is to have children, you know."

"Oh!"

Lucia's voice was hard and sharp.

"Is it?" she asked coldly.

Then suddenly her eyes widened, her lip quivered, and she hid her face on her arm; her shoulders shook.

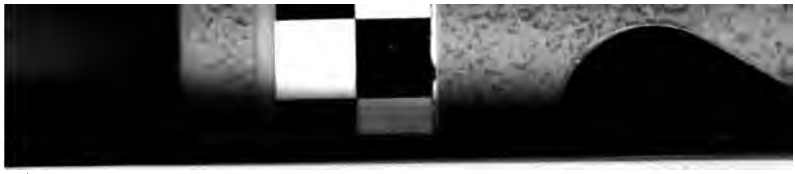
They stared at each other. What had Mattie said, to move her so? What did it mean?

But Martha Forsythe, the only one of them who would have dared it, was hanging over Lucia's chair and

Martha's arms were clasped about the shaking shoulders.

"You don't suppose it doesn't hurt him dreadfully, Lutie?" she murmured. "O Lutie, when Gretchen is older, you'll see, you'll see!"

Had anyone ever seen Lucia cry, before? They could not remember it. And it was not like other crying: not Mattie's easy, simple rain of tears; not the few, perfect drops that in great moments rolled down Betty's cheeks; not Tina's smarting eyes and husky voice, nor Marie's dry sob that hurt the heart to hear. Only those shaking shoulders and the silence of a man.



CHAPTER XXIV

The Touchstone

THE moments passed. No one of the watching three dared speak. The noises of the street below came up in a dim rumble.

"You would not be happy, Lute dear," said Mattie gently. "You may think you would, but you wouldn't."

Lucia slipped to the floor and hid her face in the warm, soft lap that waited for her. Mattie's hand touched the bright waved hair rhythmically.

"Some people grow to love their children later than others," her voice crooned on. "The baby, of course, I was crazy about from the beginning, but I never really got to love my Peep till he was thirteen—I didn't understand him. I don't believe I shall ever understand Sister; we—we seem to irritate each other. But—but I'd cut off my hand for her, Lute!"

The three looked at each other and began to rise quietly; Betty was already at the door.

"To see you run away from it, Lutie, that's what hurts us," the gentle voice went on (was this Mattie? What instinct taught her it was the moment for the scalpel?) "Of course it's easier to break it all up, and go in three different directions—you and Max are so strong! But you made a family . . . 'each one for themselves'—that's just what a family can't do!"

Lucia raised her head and stared into the soft brown

eyes above her, stared as if she would pierce through them into the very soul.

"I haven't got all your beautiful feelings, Mattie," she said harshly (her eyes were quite dry) "but do you mean to tell me that what the children would get out of it—this family business—would be worth the—the hell on earth it's going to be for me?"

"I know it," said Mattie simply. "It isn't how *you* feel, Lute dear—that doesn't matter. I can't tell you why, but it doesn't. You made a thing, and you've got to hold it together: that's all."

Lucia put her fists into her eyes like a school-boy and bent her head. Then she looked up at Mattie as a child looks up at its mother.

"All right: I'll hold it," she said.

Betty crossed over to them, swooped down with one of her supple motions and kissed Lucia's lowered lids gently, one, and then the other.

"In the end, it will hold you, child," she whispered, "and you can believe me—*for I know*—there's nothing else that will!"

Celestine walked straight to her and held out her hand.

"It's the only thing to do, Lute," she said gruffly, "buck up to your job. Your father'll be glad."

Lucia's lip quivered.

Marie leaned down behind her.

"It won't be hell on earth, little girl, truly it won't!" she breathed against her ear, and was gone.

Broken in every bone of her soul, drowsy from exhaustion, Lucia Fettauer staggered to her feet.

"I'm all in, Mattie," she muttered. "Can you keep me here?"

"Don't move," said Mattie quietly, "and I'll undress

you. Wait till I get you a night gown. Then I'll telephone. Wait, dear, wait—I'll unhook it."

Her head fell back on Martha's white pillow; she sunk into white gulfs of sleep.

Suddenly she roused, and opened startled eyes on Martha's.

"What is it?" she asked clearly. "What time is it? What's the matter? Who wants me?"

"How strange that you should wake," said Mattie, wondering. "I couldn't bear to rouse you. It's nearly midnight, dear. I was reading—Peter's not home yet."

She paused doubtfully.

"Your father's downstairs, Lucia, and—and Max," she said. "They only want to see you a moment, but your father thought it would be better to wake you. Can they come up?"

"Why—why, yes, I suppose so," and Lucia's eyes fell to the braids tumbled over her bare shoulders. "Is there a—have you a——"

But the folds of swansdown fell away from her throat, as the two men strode into the room and halted at the bed. She looked so young, so helpless, so girlish, for all her double motherhood, that their eyes betrayed them, and she searched their faces in wonder.

"What makes you look at me that way?" she asked, startled. "Has anything happened? Gretchen . . ."

Max Fettauer dropped on his knees by the dented pillow.

"O Lucia, you care! You do care!" he cried. "You care, after all!"

"Lutie," her father began huskily, "Max has something to say to you. I couldn't wait. For God's sake, listen to him!"

"I am listening," she answered quietly, shrinking in-

stinctively from her husband's hands that caught her arm in an embrace unconscious of itself. He drew away swiftly.

"Excuse me," he said.

"Lucia, I have decided not to go to Germany. It is not that I have not the right, just as you tell me you have the right to stay. But it isn't you and I—it's those two helpless little things, who never would have existed without us. I think they have their right, too—the right to both of us. I don't feel, any more than I did, that your influence, in your present mode of life, and your ideas of the relative values of things, is necessarily the best for them. I'm not as convinced as your father is that they need you. But I agree with him that *you* need *them.*"

Her eyes widened; she breathed deep.

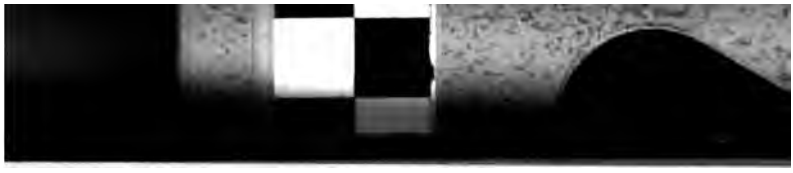
"And I have no right to take you away from them. And I will not leave you alone with them. If I went . . . I should probably not come back. So I shall stay."

He rose to his feet and the shaded night light showed the lines about his young mouth and the faint silver at his young temples.

"Stay?" she breathed.

"I make no conditions, I drive no bargain," he went on, his voice cold, now, and clear as the night outside.

"The whole thing was probably a mistake. Women like you should not marry, probably. But I took you on your own terms, and though they were wrong, I must not grumble at the results. You could not help your type: you were the result of your training and environment. I had not realized to what extent Nature has pushed her logical conclusion in you and your sort. You have borne children, but I believe you to be funda-



mentally sexless. You cannot understand the meaning of a wife."

"What is a wife, Max?" she asked sadly. But her eyes, her breast, widened with a new, deep knowledge, a joyful pain of understanding.

"I cannot tell you," he said, and he shook his head. "I doubt if any man knows. But we know what it is not. It is not a partner, it is not a 'pal,' it is not a mistress, it is not a friend. It is not even the mother of one's children. It is something different from its parts. . . ."

(Who had said that before? Something echoed in her troubled mind.—Oh, it was about the *family* that Betty had said that same thing.)

"Do you remember that day in Marie Fitch's studio, Lucia?" he asked gently. "That day we said we'd 'try it out'? I ought to have known, then. But I wanted you."

"I know," she murmured.

"Well, we've tried it out," said Max. "And it hasn't worked. Such individualism can never work. But its results——"

"Its results are Gretchen and Nette."

Her father's voice, his old, patient, comprehending voice, caught her ear.

"There are only two people who can ever understand those results, Lucia, and they are you and Max—together—who brought them into the world—together. My generation can never train them: they are beyond us. Right or wrong, they are beyond us. Max's country can never develop them. Right or wrong, they are the product of America. And Max has done a big thing in giving up, Lutie—I wish you could see how big. I am proud of him."

Lucia stretched out her arms and her father's were around her. She pressed her child-like, braided head against his neck, and his lips rested on it.

"Be a little proud of me, too, won't you, father?" she asked. "I gave up, three hours ago. I'll go to Germany."

The shock brought a look that was almost terror to her husband's eyes. It was as if life dropped suddenly into depths he had never dreamed.

"You—you gave up?" he faltered.

She nodded, wet-eyed, and held out one hand over her father's shoulder. Too wise for the mistake of a less subtle man, he pressed it frankly and friendly.

"You needn't, Lucia," he said briefly, "it was too much to ask."

"No, Max," she answered slowly, "if it was better for you, it was better for . . . all of us."

Great, hot tears rolled down her cheeks, but in her heart a strange, deep knowledge grew, moment by moment, into peace.

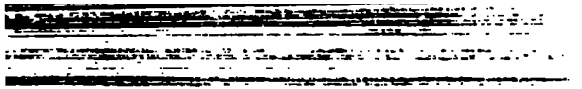
They sat on the bed, entwined in a firm clasp of hands. There was no early thrill of passion, there was even sadness in that clasp, but it was only the sadness of life, and they knew life, now, for what it was, and where their questioning keels grated on the bottom it was firm and good.

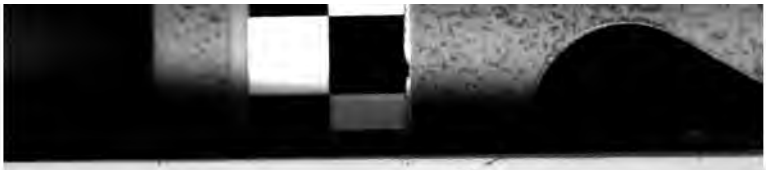
"Hush!" said the doctor quietly. "What difference does it make, here or Germany? Where you all are, together, there is your home, children. Let her sleep now, Max."

He laid her head gently on the pillow, and they sat one on either edge of Martha's quiet bed. Her braids fell wistfully over each tired cheek; in the hand of each of them rested one of hers. On her forehead was all

her childhood; but her mouth had altered, subtly, for out of her hot, impatient youth her soul had blossomed into its destined maturity.

The two men sat like watchers after a birth. Slowly the night light faded and the objects in Mattie's room took shape. Slowly the gray light turned to blue. Faint chirpings from the waking sparrows piped through the growing light. And still Lucia slept and still they watched her. Watched and wondered—for out of To-day's daughter the mother of To-morrow had been born.





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